

Selkirk v Edinburgh Accies 21.10.23

IT felt like Groundhog Day for Edinburgh Accies during a fraught 20 minute period at the start of the second half when their 20-0 lead was reduced to seven points, but on this occasion they were able to shake themselves out of their slumber and strike from deep to score two tries through replacement winger Finlay McNeill, which secured a morale-boosting win on the road.

Selkirk, meanwhile, can take some comfort from two bonus-points gained but will be frustrated that their lacklustre first half left them with too much of a mountain to climb.

“We’ve been ahead at half-time in every game this season, but in the last two weeks we’ve tapered away, and that lead has been taken from us, and it looked like that might happen again today,” reflected victorious head coach **Iain Berthinussen** afterwards. “So, credit to the boys, I thought we scored some good, clinical tries from deep, and we really backed ourselves to get the win”.

“It was always just about getting a result today and I think the boys took real ownership of that, looking at where they went wrong against Kelso last week and identifying the areas we need to develop,” he added. “We trusted ourselves a bit more, we kept the ball in hand a bit more, and I think that showed with five tries all scored by backs, which was really pleasing.”

Both sides threatened during the opening 10 minutes. **Josh Welsh**, **Calum Anderson** and **Ben Pickles** all broke the line for Selkirk, while it would have been interesting to see how hooker **Fraser Easson** got on with an overlap on the right and 20 yards to the line had the final pass gone to hand. Accies, meanwhile, created space for **Fraser Lindsay** off first phase ball although his hack ahead was tidied up by **Aaron McColm**.



The deadlock was broken by Accies on 15 minutes when **Kerr Gossman** escaped up the right touchline to set up a short period of pressure, from which scrum-half **Patrick Ritchie** scuttled over off a quick tap-penalty.

And Accies threatened again a few minutes later when Gossman once again broke clear on the wing following a powerful surge by **Jamie Sole**, but Anderson got back this time to snuff out the danger this time, so the visitors had to make do instead with a penalty from in front of the posts by **Max Wallace** to keep their side of the scoreboard ticking over.

The Edinburgh side were now looking much sharper in attack, and it took a fine tap-tackle from Pickles to prevent Wallace getting clear on the on the right, before **Cameron Bain** snaffled on overthrown line-out which provided the possession for Accies' second score, finished off on the right by **Robbie Chalmers** following some slick hands.

There was drama when Chalmers dropped the ball then picked up and shot past a clutch of sedentary Selkirk players who were presumably waiting for referee **Sam O'Neill** to blow the knock-on. The whistle didn't sound and after a discussion with his touch-judge the try was allowed to stand on the basis that the ball had been deliberately knocked forward by Selkirk into the Accies centre's chest. One old boy in the Philiphaugh stand were in danger of doing himself a mischief such was the level of apoplexy. Wells' conversion made it 20-0 at the break.



Selkirk started the second half by attacking Accies at source and they had their opponents flustered when a ferocious counter-ruck right in front of the grandstand, and the hitherto excellent Ritchie was lucky that this charged down box-kick bounced harmlessly into touch. Another box under pressure from the Accies scrum-half a few minutes later went out on the full.

All of a sudden, Accies were on the ropes. When Selkirk picked up a ruck penalty in front of the posts they went for the scrum, and got their reward when Aaron McColm looked outside but stepped inside past the Accies defence to dot down just to the right of the posts. Well played, but the Selkirk skipper will be frustrated that he didn't add the fairly straightforward conversion.

Selkirk had found their groove and after a wonderful passage of play featuring fast rucks, neat hands and sharp running lines – with Aaron McColm, **Ross Nixon** and Pickles to the fore – **Andrew Grant-Suttie** rounded the final man for an excellent try.

McColm again missed the conversion, but he was dead-on with a not-rolling-away penalty just before the hour mark which brought it back to a seven-point game.

Accies desperately needed something to stop this one getting away from them. It came in the form of a break-out on the left led by Chalmers and Lindsay, carried on by Tom Drennan in the middle of the park, before McNeill finished on the right.

Selkirk weren't done yet and Anderson, in particular, looked dangerous off some loose Accies kicking. Then a touchline drop out which went out on the full gave Selkirk a scrum-five from which they spread the ball right for **Blake Cullen** to score with his first touch since coming off the bench, and **Hugo Alderson's** touchline conversion made it a seven-point game.

Accies bounced back almost straight from the restart, threading their way through Selkirk's defence almost straight from the restart to send McNeill under the posts, setting up an easy conversion for Wells, but it would have been an injustice if Selkirk had come away empty handed, and they showed plenty of resilience by delivering a swift riposte through a **Josh Welsh** try in the corner which proved to be the last act of the game.



“At half-time, we were pretty honest with each other about that not being good enough,” said Selkirk head coach **Gordon Henderson**. “So, I asked for a reaction. All we needed to go out there was win set-piece ball, carry hard, put the ball into space, use our attacking shapes, and scores would come, which is exactly what happened.

“It is frustrating that the two times they got the ball into our 22 they scored, while we had seven opportunities to score in the second half and took four, which isn't going to win you the game when you've given the opposition a 20 point start, but fair play to the guys because they chased that kick-off down to score at the end and get two bonus points.

“I would have been gutted for the boys if they'd got nothing for that second half performance so well done to them, but I just think it is another opportunity lost. If we had played for 80, we would have won the game. And I said to them at half-time that I have no doubt they have a performance in them, and I hope they saw the evidence there that if they play in the first half like they did in the second half then we'll turn teams over.”

Teams –

Selkirk: C Anderson; B Pickles (B Cullen 68), J Welsh (R Nixon 40-58), A Grant-Suttie, F Wheelans (R Nixon 62); Aaron McColm (R Nixon 8-15), H Alderson; L Pettie (J Millburn 72), F Easson (B Riddell 52), J Millburn (F Easson 62, S Clark 72), A Cochrane, J Turnbull (L Cassidy 62), R Murray (L Cassidy 23-40), S McClymont, Andrew McColm.

Edinburgh Accies: R Chalmers; F Lindsay, M Wallace, G Woods, K Gossman (F McNeill 55); B Appleson, P Ritchie (B Grainger 55); C Imrie, F McAslan (G Hall 62), A Hain (S Habib 62), T Drennan, C Bain (D McGrath 37), A Inwood, T Jones, J Sole.

Report by The Offside Line

Photos by Grant Kinghorn