

## Currie Chieftains v Selkirk – 04.11.23

**A RETURN** to winning ways, but it got pretty hairy towards the end for Currie Chieftains, who had to withstand a rousing rally from a Selkirk side who found themselves 19-0 down after 15 minutes but refused to throw in the towel.

“In the end, they could have won it, so I’m relieved,” conceded Chieftains head coach **Mark Cairns** afterwards. “We got the win and we got five points, so it’s a good day.

“We started well, some of our attack was pretty decent and we’re pleased with our maul set-up, but defence was disappointing,” he added. “It wasn’t so much missed tackles to give away tries, it was when we had opportunities to really put pressure on them we allowed them to continue to build momentum, and after the first 15 minutes we were just really careless in possession when we had opportunities to exit our half, so we couldn’t really continue to build on scores.”

After setting the pace during the opening weeks of this season, Chieftains had lost three out of their last four matches coming into this one, which had seen them drop-out the top four for the first time in a long time, but Cairns insisted that there is no need to press the panic button yet.

“We’ve got a really good culture at the club so we can keep guys for long periods, but we’re now losing players more often to Super Series, and we’ve got a lot of injuries so we’re asking a lot of our young backs at the moment,” he explained. “It’s just not clicking. I don’t think its fitness, they are training really well. I think a lot of it is to do with momentum and confidence which we are building.

“Last season we lost to Hawick, Marr and Accies away. The same has happened this season and everyone thinks the wheels have come off. It just happened in quick succession this time. We’ve got all these teams to play at home and we’ve got a game in hand, so this league campaign is still in our hands. We’ve just got to build momentum week-on-week.”



Despite the loss of skipper **Jamie Forbes** with a calf issue just before kick-off, Chieftains could hardly have got off to a better start, racing into the lead inside two minutes with a sweeping try featuring a cute backhanded offload out of contact from **Roy Vucago**, pace on the right touchline from **James McCaig** (celebrating his 50th appearance for the club), and good hands from **Sam Leto** and **DJ Innes** to send scrum-half **Cameron Lessels** over.

The hosts then doubled their account by twice kicking penalties to the corner and after being held up over the line on the first occasion, Vucago pirouetted off the second line-out maul to get the ball down when they got another bite of the cherry. The Chiefs hooker then helped himself to his second try of the match with just over 10

minutes played in very similar style to his first, and **Sam Leto**'s conversion made it 19-0 with Selkirk yet to have a meaningful possession.

That was about to change, however, with Selkirk pressurising the restart to reclaim possession, then ripping through several sharp phases before stand-off **Aaron McColm** floated through a yawning gap in the home defence for a try which was converted by **Hugo Alderson**, who then slotted a 40-yard high-tackle penalty to make it a nine-point game.



It proved to be only a temporary halt in the general momentum of this first half, and after Innes, McCaig and Vucago had threatened again on the right only to be pulled back for a forward pass, Chieftains struck again on the other side of the park when **Sam Cardosi**'s offload out of contact gave **Alex Harley** a sniff of the line, although the stand-in stand-off still had a bit of work to do in gliding past at least two tacklers on his way to the line.

Selkirk's lack of composure and/or accuracy at key moments wasn't helping their cause. Twice they kicked out on the full, a line-out on Currie's 22 was overthrown. and another promising attack from a five-yard scrum floundered when **Josh Welsh** fumbled the final pass on the right touchline.

Slowly but surely, however, the Borderers began to gain a foothold in the match, and after several minutes of pressure inside the home 22, they struck again on the stroke of half-time, kicking the umpteenth penalty conceded by Chieftains to the corner and winning clean line-out ball for **James Bett** to finish off the maul. Alderson's conversion made it 26-17 at the break.

Chieftains struck first in second half when a period of pressure culminated in Innes bouncing one tackle and scrambling under the posts, with Leto again converting, but Selkirk wouldn't lie down and responded almost immediately when good continuity play released Welsh on the right, who timed his pass back inside well to send **Andrew Grant-Suttie** home.



The hosts thought they had scored again when **Rhys Davies** broke from their increasingly dominant maul and barged over from 10 yards out, but the powerful and influential back-rower somehow lost control of the ball as he dived for the line. But there was no slip-ups a few minutes later when a slick set-move from a scrum sent **Euan Crombie** over.

That could easily have been it, but Selkirk bounced back again with **Blake Cullen** wasting little time making his mark off the bench, performing a terrific chase of his own kick ahead to score on the right, which was the catalyst for a rousing finale from the visitors.

With their tails up, Selkirk threatened again down the left only to be pulled back for a marginal forward pass. Then a sweeping attack featuring **Ruaridh Murray**, **Scott McLymont** and Cullen had Chieftains frantically scrambling in defence, and then **Andrew Cochrane** was held up over the line, before a well-judged diagonal into the corner was chased down by Welsh for a richly deserved try.



It was an impressive fightback and Selkirk were not done yet. They came again, only to let a golden opportunity to secure a wonderful comeback win slip through their fingers with an overthrown line-out deep inside the strike zone.

“We got two points from a game where it looked like we were getting nothing after 15 minutes, but then could have got five at the end only to lose a five-metre line-out,” shrugged **Gordon Henderson**, the Selkirk coach, who looked like he didn’t know whether to laugh or cry.

“You don’t give good sides like Currie 19 points of a start, but we showed great attitude to come back, we had some excellent attacking shape, and we’ll take a lot of confidence from that,” he added. “So, we’re really pleased with some aspects of that performance and we’re not far away from really killing somebody now.”

## Teams –

**Currie Chieftains:** S Leto; J McCaig, E Crombie (A Harley 72), D Innes, R Daley; A Harley (C Taylor 65), C Lessels (P Boyer 57); C Anderson (T Jeffrey 36, R Vucago 72), R Vucago (S Fisher 55), G Carson (C Anderson 55), A Bain, C West, R Davies, A Fletcher (K Steel, 55), S Cardosi.

**Selkirk:** C Anderson; B Pickles, A Grant-Suttie, R Nixon (B Cullen 62), J Welsh; Aaron McColm, H Alderson (R Legge 62); L Pettie (Z Szwagrzak 72), J Bett (B Riddell 58), Z Szwagrzak (J Millburn 62), C Turnbull, A Cochrane, L Cassidy, S McClymont©, R Murray.

Report by The Offside Line

Photos by Grant Kinghorn