

Selkirk v Glasgow Hawks – 11.11.23

SELKIRK took a major step away from the spectre of relegation with a stunning last-gasp win against **Glasgow Hawks** this [Saturday] afternoon.

These were two sides vying to put extra daylight between themselves and basement club Jed-Forest, Selkirk having won just two in ten games and Hawks three in nine leading into the match, and with a comfortable Hawks' win at home when the sides first met Selkirk knew they had to lift their game. For most of the contest, however, they trailed and as the clock headed towards full-time what had been a tight affair with Hawks setting the pace and Selkirk pulling them back in seemed to be heading the visitors' way.

But, in the final minute, after a long-range penalty from Selkirk scrum-half **Hugo Alderson** had fallen short, Hawks ran the ball back upfield, only to lose it, allowing Selkirk a last line-out on their 22. The hosts seized their chance, moving ball swiftly across field and when full-back **Callum Anderson** looped his wing **Josh Welsh**, took his pass and dived into the corner, the rook of the new Philiphaugh stand seemed to be in danger such was the dramatic conclusion.



Anderson admitted: "I was feeling quite depressed a few minutes before that and I thought our chance had gone with that penalty, but there have been plenty of times that we've been on the wrong side of late drama like that. This game and the Kelso game we've managed to score late tries and sometimes you need that little bit of luck.

"I think the ten minutes before that where we had a strong defensive set, and they scored three points but we kept them from a try, earned us that chance to go and win it. And we owe our home support that after games this season where we have not been at our best here. We probably still weren't at our best but I'm chuffed to bits – I know Josh would get his hands free and I just had to be there to catch it and not knock-on!"

By contrast, **Wayne Burrows**, the Hawks centre, thought he had won it with two second half penalties, and wore a hugely dejected look at the finish.

"The polite reaction is one of frustration," he said. "We gave them too many opportunities and that last try typified it – we were a bit immature in how we played that last minute, made some glaring mistakes, and allowed them the chance to score again. I still thought at the end that we'd done just enough because we controlled big parts of that game, but ultimately we couldn't get away on the scoreboard, and gave them too many easy opportunities to keep it close.

"Don't get me wrong, Selkirk played a lot of good rugby and came out on the right side of the scoreline, without many chances, which is what good teams do, but we know we haven't progressed the way we'd want to in recent weeks. We need to find a bit of grit now and get that winning mentality back, and start to compound positives rather than errors, which has been the story of our season a bit thus far."



Both of these sides have shown an ability to finish off good tries in games but have had their challenges keeping the door closed, so it was a bit of a surprise to see tight defences and a distinct lack of clear-cut scoring chances in the game. The big defensive hits delighted supporters of both sides, and ensured attacks reaching several phases were few, and that the game remained in the melting pot until the final minute.

The game had fallen into a pattern with Hawks dominating a period of play and scoring, and Selkirk then coming back at them. The men from the west opened the scoring after 14 minutes when a strong line-out maul carried them into the home 22 and slick attack to the left, with a neat scissors between impressive full-back **James Coupar** and left wing **Sam Graham** had Selkirk scampering, and when the ball was shipped right, blindside flanker **Lewis Stewart** showed a neat turn of pace to race into the corner. After missing an early penalty, Burrows slotted a far more difficult touchline conversion.

The hosts responded with a good period of possession but the home support had to wait until the 25th minute to see a try. It stemmed from a good line-out on the right, both sides showing slick touchline play throughout, and when Hawks were tied into stopping centre-field attacks, **Ross Nixon**, who started the game at centre but shifted to fly-half after a back injury forced **Aaron McColm** off, slipped through a gap out left to run in behind the posts. Alderson levelled the scores with the conversion.



With both sides over eager to put boot to ball, they struggled to retain possession through enough phases to create real opportunities. But, with eight minutes of the half left, Hawks revealed a clever line-out move that left Selkirk stunned. One favoured by Scotland in the past, the pods split front and back with Selkirk expecting a maul, only for scrum-half **James Imrie** to race into the hole to claim **Paul Cairncross**' throw and shrug off a despairing tackle to touch down in the right-hand corner.

But back came Selkirk with the next score, as the clock ticked past 40 minutes, a concerted period of attack on the Hawks' 22 led to **Finlay Wheelans** using all of his pace and power to squeeze into the right-hand corner. Hawks finished the half pressing the home 22 but a knock-on ensured the sides trooped inside level at 12-12.

The sides changed ends as always on the restart but little else changed about this game, with plenty of toil, sweat and battering tackles, and no little kicking, but threatening play inside either 22 limited. The reasons were both the quality of defensive effort, players of both sides getting off the ground quickly to make another tackle, and a lack of pace and incisive running lines that played into the hands of defences.

Almost inevitably, Hawks were first on the scoresheet in the second period, Burrows' decision to kick ball wide to the right flank meeting a howl of protest from a supporter only for it to bounce perfectly for wing **Ryan Flett**, who gathered one-handed and raced 15 metres into the corner – as Burrows had planned.

Ten minutes later, Selkirk's pack levelled the game again, a line-out being driven over and skipper **Scott McClymont** touching down. A fine touchline conversion by Alderson handed the hosts the lead for the first time in the game, but it didn't last too long.



Burrows slotted a penalty to edge Hawks in front after 58 minutes, Alderson missed one 45-metre effort but nailed one from 38 metres, and with six minutes to go Burrows nosed Hawks back in front 23-22 with another penalty from a scrum after Selkirk had resisted a concerted period of Hawks attack inside their 22.

And with referee **John Smith**'s watch in the red, Selkirk brought the late drama, to claim four points, meaning they move to within one point of Hawks and close to the mid-table mix.

Teams –

Selkirk: C Anderson; B Cullen, B Pickles, R Nixon, J Welsh; Aaron McColm, H Alderson; L Pettie, J Bett, Z Szwagrzak, C Turnbull, A Cochrane, L Cassidy, S McClymont (c), Andrew McColm. **Subs (all played):** B Riddell, J Millburn, J Turnbull, F Wheelans, C Eason.

Glasgow Hawks: J Couper; R Flett, J Pinkerton, W Burrows, S Graham; G Cruickshanks, J Imrie; K Shanahan, P Cairncross, M Goodwin, M Crumlish, S Leckey, L Stewart, R Howie, T Wright. **Subs (all played):** A Burgess, E Cairns, T Sofidaya, Y Shaheen, D McCartney.

Report by The Offside Line

Photos by Grant Kinghorn