


Rugby – Heriots v Melrose

Five try Heriots beat Melrose at home to come within two points of the table-topping Borders' side



Melrose travelled up from the borders to meet Heriots in a highly entertaining top of the table clash at Goldenacre. And it was to be the Edinburgh side that ran out eventual winners with a powerful display of running rugby. Less than five minutes of the match had been played before Heriots scored their opener. Following the opening kick exchange, the home side went on the offensive and drove up the field through the forwards. Recycling the ball deep in the Melrose 22, they drew the defence in leaving winger, Max Learmonth (above) with a short run in to dot the ball down in the corner. In what was to be a difficult day for Graham Wilson, the conversion was missed, so the score stood at 5-0. Melrose held possession from the restart for only a couple of minutes before losing the ball, and the Goldenacre side were off again. This time the attack was awarded with a penalty in front of the posts and Wilson stepped up to slot home for the points. 8-0 to Heriots.

Another restart kick exchange gave the visitors a chance to hold onto the ball for a bit longer, but the Heriots defence held up and a bit of fortune for the Borders side put them on the front foot. Recovering a charged down kick, Melrose quickly got the ball moving and were rapidly into the 22. They nearly broke through the defence, but they were held out, only for front row, Nick Beavon to reach out and ground the ball on the line for a try. Joe Helps scored the conversion and the score was now 8-7 to Heriots. For the next 15 or so minutes the match swung back and forth, with neither team gaining much of an advantage, until another home side attack lead to a penalty five metres out. Choosing to go for the lineout 

rather than points, Heriots won their ball and a series of forward drives took the ball up to the line. They were held up inches short, but recycled quickly and set up another ruck on the right. From the ensuing pile up, one man popped out and over the line, but lost the ball as he hit the ground. The remainder of the half was fairly inconclusive with both sides gaining and losing possession and the first half drew to a close 8-7 to the home side.

After a highly entertaining first half, could the second half live up to expectations? Oh, yes! This time there was just over a minute on the clock before Heriots scored their try. Chasing a kick through, Keith Buchan beat Melrose's stand-off, Richard Mill, to the ball and was off. With only scrum-half, Colvine between them and the line, he passed the ball inside to the supporting No.2, George Turner who sprinted in to dive over. Wilson put the ball between the posts and so the score was now at 15-7 to Heriots. Melrose came back strongly, however, and Heriots were forced to clear from close to, and behind, their line on a couple of occasions, but the Melrose men were rewarded with a penalty out in front, which Helps saw over to bring the score to 15-10. The home side then went straight up the pitch with the forwards in the driving seat again and this time, Keith Buchan was the try scorer. Winning a line out deep in the Melrose half, Heriots moved the ball quickly through the hands to leave Buchan with a bit of room to get over the line. Wilson missed the kick so it was 20-10.

Melrose followed this up with a sustained assault on the Heriots line. Combining forwards' driving and rucking with backs passing and running, Melrose had the home side at sixes-
[x] and-sevens and something had to give. That something created a hole for the visitors centre, and Scotland Under-20 player, Damien Hoyland to burst through and score near the right touchline. Helps stepped up and nailed the difficult conversion to bring the visitors up to within three

points at 20-17. Once again, Heriots got back on the horse and, denying Melrose ball, they fired up the middle of the pitch to score their fourth, and bonus point, try with a second for Buchan. 25-17. Melrose then had a bit of possession, but Heriots soon won the ball back after a bit of fumbling from the visitors to put Learmonth clear on the left wing. With two men in his way, he just drove through to place the ball for his second, and Heriot's fifth, try of the day. With Wilson missing again, that proved to be the final score with Heriots winning a well contested and entertaining match, 30 points to 17.

So the third and fourth best teams in Scotland had served up a match worthy of their positions at the top of the RBS Premiership and have opened up a five point gap to third place Gala with still half the season to play. Weekend off for this reporter next week, with some Polo, and then it's three weeks of Internationals as Scotland take on Japan, South Africa and Australia in the 'viagogo Autumn Tests'.

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