


Rugby – Stewarts-Melville v Watsonians

Stew-Mel hang on for a narrow win at Inverleith.



What had been a miserable start to the day, brightened up a bit for Watsonians' visit to Inverleith to play Stewarts-Melville in the latest round of the RBS National league. With the hosts looking for their fourth win in a row and second in the table Watsonians fielding a much changed team from the programme listing, it looked like being a close encounter.

However, for the first half of the match it looked anything but. Following a clearing kick from a ruck, Stew-Mel quickly passed the ball out right to winger Matt Morrell – who was to prove a thorn in 'Sonian's side all day – who took off down the wing. Opposing wing, Jack Ferguson, performed what looked like a try-saving tap-tackle just inside the 22, but Morrell managed to pick himself up and dive over in the corner for the opener (top). Nick McCashin failed with the attempt at goal, so the hosts were only 5-0 ahead – after three minutes. A couple of minutes later, they were at it again. A brief period of Watsonians possession in their own half was kicked away, and a repeat of 'Try 1' looked on the cards. This time Morrell was stopped, but a penalty for offside had been awarded and, this time, McCashin put the ball between the sticks to take the score up to 8-0. Another three minutes, another repeat play. This time the penalty was against Morrell out wide, but McCashin's boot was accurate and again the kick went over. 11-0 to the home side. Watsonians then managed to get a score on the board with penalty from Ben Di Rollo, before Stew-Mel were back on programme and away up the field again. Another  penalty award was missed by McCashin, so the score remained at 11-3. Although Watsonians had evened out the possession a

touch, they were unable to break through the Stew-Mel defence with any great conviction and had to rely on the boot of Di Rollo with two minutes left in the half to get them back on the scoreboard. The half finished soon after, very much in the same vein as it had started, with Stew-Mel on the attack and Watsonians defending desperately.

On resumption of hostilities, the match carried on where it had left off, but four minutes in, Stew-Mel's No. 4, Jonathan Hamblin saw yellow for some foul play at a set piece, but this didn't phase the Inverleith men and they managed to advance their score by three with another penalty from McCashin. The next period of play was a bit more evenly matched with Watsonians managing to see a bit more of the ball and with 15 minutes on the clock, their pack got the ball over the line. However, the referee ruled the ball held up and they were awarded a 5-metre scrum. They weren't going to be held out twice in a row though, and the pack forced Matt Brierley over the line next to the posts for a try. Di Rollo scored the conversion and the score was now 14-13 to the home side.

The rest of the match was fairly evenly balanced, although McCashin missed two further penalty attempts, and both sides came within inches of scoring but strong defending on the part of both teams kept the score finely balanced. With just the dying seconds of the match remaining, Watsonians were turned over from a ruck deep in Stew-Mel's 22 and all the home side had to do was run about for a short time to run the clock down. However, two of them managed to run into each other and the visitors were awarded a scrum for accidental blocking a few yards out. As the crowd held it's collective breath, Stew-Mel came up with the ball and 'Sonians were pinged by the ref for offside. Substitute scrum-half, Mike Kerr, unfortunately, made the referee aware of his disappointment at the decision, which earned him a yellow card. On his way off the pitch, he reiterated his feelings on the matter, which, consequently, earned him a red. All Stew-Mel then had to do was boot the

ball into the stands and the match was over, to the great relief of anyone and everyone in the red/black/yellow colours of the hosts.

A very close match – eventually – but Watsonians, for the first half, looked nowhere near to being title contenders, which , given how they have been playing this season, must have come as a bit of a shock to the faithful.

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