

Rugby – Watsonians v Stewarts-Melville

Watsonians take the win, but Stew-Mel take the play-off spot.



Watsonians hosted Edinburgh rivals, Stewarts-Melville, at Myreside on Saturday with both teams in with a chance of taking second place in the National League. In, what was, a fairly complicated scenario, Stew-Mel held second place, four points ahead of 'Sonians. However, 'Sonians had a superior scored points difference so if they could win the match and deprive Stew-Mel of a losing bonus point, then they would take the place. Other permutations were available...

It started badly for the visitors as the kick off went straight into touch, so immediately putting the home side on the front foot. Winning the ball from an early line out, the backs got into top gear and Rory Steele almost broke through down the right, but was pulled up a couple of metres out. A quick recycle and a couple of passes put Ross Aitken through for the opening try with just over five minutes played. Aly Ledingham slotted the kick and it was 7-0 to the home side. It then took Stew-Mel just less than ten minutes to pull a try back. Gradually working themselves back into the game they pushed upfield and almost managed to maul over for a try on the right of the posts, but were held out. The ball was quickly fired off across the pitch and, with the defence caught a touch narrow, Alan Whittingham got outside Steele and dotted down in the corner for a try. With the kick going astray in the stiff wind it was now 7-5 to Watsonians.



With the match finely poised, both sides were looking for the next score and the game ebbed and flowed back and forth, using all the available pitch, but neither team could get the vital breakthrough. Watsonians did get across the line around the 30 minute mark, but the referee had spotted a forward pass so it wasn't until a couple of minutes before the break that they scored their second try. With Steel given little room for manoeuvre down the right hand touch line, he put a kick through and hared off after the ball, managing to beat the defenders to the touch down. The referee had a quick consultation with his assistant – or 'with the invisibly, non-existent fourth official' as the announcer put it – and then awarded the try. The kick was missed, so Watsonians took their 12-5 lead into the break, but Stewarts-Melville were still clinging on for the bonus point.

A bonus point which looked as if it might be a bit more secure early in the second half as a penalty award gave Nick McCashin a chance to pull back three points. He hit the post, but from the restart, the bonus point looked even more secure. Collecting the ball around half way, Whittingham set off, beating the first attempted tackle by Aitken and found an almost clear run in to the line. So he took it and ran in the visitor's second try virtually unopposed, touching down to the left of the posts. McCashin stepped up to draw the sides level with the conversion, but contrived hit the other post, so 12-10 it remained. With 25 minutes still to go, it was going to be close. Watsonians had to score a converted try, but Stewarts-Melville were taking every opportunity, with the wind at their backs, to boot the ball as far away from their line as possible. 'Sonians then had to run the ball upfield and start again – it was actually more exciting than that, but essentially, that's the picture!

One of these runs upfield then paid off. An attack developed down the right and a missed tackle on Chris Scott, left them with an overlap, which they fully exploited to get across the line. An inside ball back to Scott and the wing was over. He fell over, but picked himself up to dive behind the posts for the home side's third try and the place erupted with the home fans going wild. Ben Di Rollo knocked over the simple kick and they had a clear nine point lead, going into the final few minutes 19-10 ahead.



Those few minutes were to prove their undoing. With the kick off going deep, Di Rollo let the ball bounce before he gathered it and set off. This gave Stew-Mel the chance to get up and the first man in tackled Di Rollo round the ankles and quickly got over the ball, forcing Di Rollo to hold on and give away a penalty. With the line out set on the five metre line, Stew-Mel won their own ball and set up a maul. This went to ground just short but the ball popped out the back and that man, Whittingham, was first there and dived over to score the 'winning' try and it was the visitor's turn to raise the roof. Mike Hanning missed the kick, but a minute or so later it was all over. Stew-Mel had, to use a well-worn phrase, 'Lost the Battle, but won the War'. That try had given them enough points for the losing bonus point and the vital play-off place.

That play-off will be against Edinburgh Academy, who lost 23-17 to Stirling County and who have tumbled down through the Premiership to end up in ninth place, and with it, the attendant risk of relegation.

So, what about the featured match? It could have oh, so easily have degenerated into a tug-of-war with neither side wanting to lose, but needing to find the balance which would give them the required result, However, it turned out to be a highly entertaining match – much more so then the game at Murrayfield the previous night – and, although there was a bit of ‘run up and get the ball kicked back’ for a brief period, both sides can be proud of their efforts. As it was, Stew-Mel’s efforts paid the required dividend and forward they go to seek their place in the top division.

Images of the match will be uploaded to [here](#) over the next few days.