

Rugby – Stewarts-Melville v Watsonians, RBS National League, Div. 1

'Sonians come back from the brink to take the win



If only the possession and territory stats from the first half had been consulted then the observer would have been expecting a veritable cricket score from Stewarts-Melville, but – as someone famous once (should have) said – there are lies, damned lies and the result at the final whistle!

The first half of Stew-Mel's final – and extremely windy – home match of the league was played almost completely in Watsonians half. Indeed, a large part was played in their 22, with the home side dominating almost the whole of the gameplay – lineouts and scrums included – and only some desperate defence, coupled with the odd handling error, kept the home side at bay.

Just as the match was entering the second quarter, Stew-Mel's ever present winger, Matt Morrell, broke clear and almost made it through, but the opposing 10, Andrew Chalmers just managed to haul him down. The quickly recycled ball then found its way out to the opposing wing, Angus Rennie, who went over in the corner. However, in the resultant celebrations, the fact that the assistant referee on that side had his flag up for a foot in touch was missed, soon brought reality crashing back down.

Despite another couple of near misses for the home side, Watsonians held out and the half ended at, what was, a fairly uneven 0-0.

With Brian Walls (above) on to replace the, seemingly

struggling, Reiss Cullen at scrum half mid way through the first half, things had picked up a touch for Watsonians and this move came to fruition in the second half. 'Sonians still had to endure a continuation of the first half Stew-Mel dominance for a period as the Inverleith side continued to push for a score.

The first chance came less than 10 minutes in with a penalty award in front of the posts. Unfortunately, in a repeat of his first half 'go-at-goal', Nick McCashin had to watch his kick rattle off the upright. This time, however, Stew-Mel were on the ball and were immediately in possession a couple of metres out. They rucked their way up to and, nearly over, the line, forcing referee, James McPhail, to award a scrum when he couldn't see the ball grounded. From the scrum, No 8 Adam Howie, crashed over for the opening try. This time McCashin scored the extras and Stew-Mel were 7-0 ahead with 10 minutes played.



Straight from the restart, the home side were at it again. No 6, Hugh Lindsay, got his hands on the ball and returned play to the Watsonians half once again. He was stopped by full back, Chad Northcott, but a couple of rucks and the ball was spun out to McCashin, who then passed the ball on to Lindsay. The try scorer was stopped just short, but McCashin had followed up and was on hand to receive the off-load and dive over for another try. This time, the wind defeated his attempt at goal, but the home side were now 12-0 ahead.

This is when it all started to go wrong for Stew-Mel. Whether they had taken their foot off the gas, or had simply run out off the proverbial, Watsonians now started to come back into the match. They began to get their game together and pushed Stew-Mel further and further into their own half. A period of pressure near the home line kept the defence busy, but, at around the 20 minute mark, Walls used his experience and,

taking advantage of a bit of space, landed a neat drop goal to, at least, put 'Sonians on the score board.

This seemed to galvanise his team into action and they continued to pressurise the opposition in their own half. A few minutes after Walls' goal, Watsonians were on the attack again. A clearing kick was fielded by Northcott and a long pass from the full back, stretched the defence a touch, allowing a break to develop. The ball was swiftly through the hands and out to the wing where it found one of the Millers – the Watsonians' team sheet, once again, was nowhere near what the program said – and the No 6 ran in for his try. Walls then managed to convert in the wind and the score was now, much closer, 12-10.

All to play for then. In a reverse of the first half situation, it was Watsonians who dominated the final 10, or so minutes of play. And, eventually, they forced a penalty in the 22 with about five minutes left. Once again, Walls stepped up for the kick, and his compensation for the wind just held out as the ball squeezed past the left hand upright for the point and to put the visitors in the lead for the first time at 13-12.

Stew-Mel made a gallant attempt to resurrect their game, but had to settle for a long range penalty from McCashin just on full time. However, his kick went nowhere near and Walls booted the ball into the stand to end a real nail biter of a match, 13-12 to Watsonians.

With just a couple of rounds left, plus the odd re-scheduled match, Stew-Mel are in second place in the League with 71 points – Selkirk having secured the title – with two away matches still to play. Watsonians lie in fourth place, nine points in arrears, but have three home matches coming up, so it's not all done and dusted just yet. Watch this space!

Images from the match will appear [here](#) over the next few days.