

Rugby – Stewarts-Melville v GHA, BT National League, Div. 1

Stew-Mel get back to Winning Ways



After a two-from-two start to the season Stewarts-Melville suffered a string of five defeats in a row to leave them second bottom of the BT National League's second division prior to kick off against GHA on Saturday.

Five minutes into the match saw them with the first points on the board.


A mistake from GHA had the ball back in Stew-Mel hands after the opening exchanges and, swiftly moving the ball through the hands, full-back, Ross McCann outran the defence (above) to dot down for the opener. Club Captain, Mike Hanning – playing at 10 – missed the conversion, but the home side were 5-0 ahead after five minutes.

GHA enjoyed a couple of periods of possession before the next Stew-Mel try, but, unfortunately, mistakes with handling handed the ball back to the home side.

One of these errors gave Stew-Mel the chance to clear from their own half. Pressure on the kicker then forced a less than ideal clearance and, with ball in hand, wing, Angus Rennie went half the length of the pitch only to be brought down a few metres out. But, the home side pack was quickly up and the ball came out to Andrew Manson at scrum half. Once again the ball ended up with McCann who, breaking another tackle, went in under the posts. Hanning made no mistake with the kick and Stew-Mel were 12-0 up with 25 minutes still to play.

GHA now started to come back into the match and spent a decent amount of time in the home half, but more errors cost them possession and allowed the opposition to set up a series of attacks. They came close a couple of times, but finally GHA were caught offside and, following an unsuccessful advantage, Hanning knocked over a penalty for 15-0.

By the time the third home try was scored, the GHA coaching staff were 'treated' to a string of errors both with handling and general play. A home side scrum about 10 metres out was, once again, dominated by Stew-Mel and they proceeded to push GHA back towards the try line. Eventually, the referee had no option but to award a penalty try, which Hanning converted for a 22-0 lead.

Unfortunately, one of the GHA front row, Michael Fox was left injured on the pitch. Medical staff from both sides attended the player, who had suffered, what appeared to be, a serious neck injury and an ambulance was called. First on the scene was paramedic help, followed some 20 minutes later, by a 'full size' ambulance to cart the player off to A+E for, what thankfully turned out to be, 'only' a check-up. The ref, by this time had called a halt to the half with a couple of minutes left and these were to be added to the second half. 

It was a different GHA who took the field for the second half and for the half, the home side barely saw the ball. Eight minutes in and GHA finished off a fine passage of close in play with a try from no 13, Chris Binnie, converted by Peter Jericevich for 22-7

Stew-Mel had a brief moment of decent possession from the restart, but then had to endure a barrage of attacking play – and a yellow for Willie Aitken – which led to a strangely disallowed try for GHA's Alan Auld and a second, allowed, try for Binnie. Jericevich once again scored his kick and GHA were creeping closer at 22-14.

Back they came and pressed the Stew-Mel defence until a clearing kick from Hanning bounced and skittered its way to the GHA five metre line. With calls to let it run, try scorer Binnie was a little slow to get to the ball, giving Stew-Mel's Ruaridh Stewart time to make ground. He then managed to charge down the kick and regain possession. The visiting defence got in his way, but the ball found its way to Mike Hanning who ran in the home side's fourth try to take them into bonus point territory. He missed the conversion but the score was out to 27-14 leaving 11 minutes (nine of this half, plus those missing two...) for GHA to catch up.



A final seconds' score by No 14, Rangi Jericevich followed up another period of dominant play, but the missed conversion by the other Jericevich went on to leave the final score at 27-19.

Despite playing well in the first half , Stew-Mel were almost overwhelmed by GHA in the second, enjoying very little possession and, without that fortunate(?) charge down, things might not have gone their way in the end. Still, a win's a win and they have now climbed up the table to third from bottom.....

Images from the match will appear here eventually as it's a busy week ahead for this reporter through in Glasgow.