

Skerries 28 Dunbar 23

DUNBAR and Haddington both tasted defeat on their biennial excursions to Ireland to play local clubs there, coinciding with Scotland's clash with the Irish in the 6 Nations.

Dunbar headed to Skerries once more and were looking to go four years in a row as holders of the Shield, a feat last achieved between 1964 and 1967. This was to be the 62nd fixture between these two great friends and a first held under floodlights.

Dunbar had two thirds of their first XV on show and were confident going into the match.

Dunbar, with the strong wind at their backs, went on the attack from the kick-off and were rewarded with a penalty. Good play between the forwards saw an early opportunity, but Skerries cleared upfield.

Dunbar were on the back foot but good strength saw the ball stripped by skipper Andrew Wightman. Dunbar immediately went on the counter-attack, with quick ball to winger John Peebles, who took on his opposite number and broke clear to run in at the corner after five minutes. Kieran Donnellan missed the tough conversion.

Skerries then looked to have levelled on seven minutes with a three-man overlap but luckily for Dunbar they knocked the ball on. Skerries continued to press but again Wightman robbed the ball in the loose.

With 18 minutes played, Dunbar increased their lead when Wightman crashed over from a maul near the Skerries line. Blair Mills took over

the kicking duties and stroked the ball between the posts.

Dunbar again pressed and were rewarded when Skerries strayed off-side, Mills adding the three points to give Dunbar a 15-0 lead after 22 minutes. Skerries could easily have seen a player red carded for a bad trip on Calum Champion as the flanker headed to the try line, but unbelievably there was not even a yellow.

With half-time looming, the kick went to the corner. A clean catch then saw Derek Anderson drive to the line and set up good ball for Champion to crash over.

Dunbar, with a 20-0 lead, looked to hold that to the half-time whistle. Skerries had other ideas and they came straight up the park. Good play by their stand-off John Gavin saw the player weave his way through the Dunbar defence to score. Emmet Brannigan added the extra points as the referee blew for time. This was the third week in a row Dunbar had conceded on the half-time whistle.

Dunbar now faced the strong wind and would have to dig deep to cling on to the match.

Skerries struggled from the Dunbar restart and Dunbar were all over the ball. The referee awarded a penalty to the visitors and Mills decided to go for goal, which surprised the supporters of both sides. The youngster calmly stepped forward and kicked a magnificent penalty through the middle of the posts.

Dunbar then stepped on a mine as they struggled to clear their line. The clearance kick rebounded off a Dunbar player straight to a Skerries man. The ball was quickly moved wide for their centre to burst through



● Dunbar's Andrew Wightman dives over for a try, but Dunbar ended up losing narrowly at Skerries

some shoddy tackling. Gavin added the extra points to bring Skerries to within nine points at 23-14 with 44 minutes played.

Skerries continued to press home the wind advantage and were awarded a penalty when Dunbar went off-side. The kick went in the corner and Skerries took control before playing out wide to their big centre, who broke two tackles to score. Gavin again added the extra points to close the gap to just two points.

Dunbar then had their best play of the half when winger James Kelly broke up the wing. Skerries' scrambled defence just managed to bundle him into touch at the corner flag. Dunbar again were pushed back and again the Skerries pack moved forward. Dunbar struggled to hold on and Skerries drove over to take the lead for the first time after 60 minutes. Gavin kept up the good work with the boot to give his side a five-point cushion.

Skerries had been struggling with the restarts and Champion got hold of the loose ball before charging to the line, only for the flanker to be stopped inches from his target. Scrum-half Mills then had a go under the posts and was also stopped short of the line. The ball was recycled quickly and centre Sandy Thomson burst over for what looked like a good try. The referee, however, had a different view and said the ball was held up.

Champion again took the ball on before Gary Peebles burst through but lost the ball in contact. Skerries cleared downfield to the 22, where the Dunbar full-back Antoin Penrose was waiting. The youngster attempted to play 50 metres upfield but was stopped by a high tackle. Dunbar kicked to the corner with time against them.

Good possession by Stuart Crichton saw the ball go wide to Champion, who drove forward. Dunbar in desperation lost possession and were penalised for hands in the ruck. Skerries

kicked to touch and the referee blew for full time.

After the match, 138 attended the celebration dinner, where Skerries were presented with the Shield for the first time in four years.

Dunbar played well but lost out at critical stages in the game.

