**Sunday’s Well 12 Skerries 13.**

On a blustery misty day in Cork; Sunday’s Well faced up to the challenge of high-flying Skerries at Irish Independent Park. It was a hard-fought exciting game; with the ‘Well fighting their way back from a 13 point deficit at half-time; but just fell agonisingly short as they lost out by the slimmest of margins at the end to lose their unbeaten home record.

jAs suggested by the turnaround in the scoring; the ‘Well played into a very stiff breeze at half-time. Skerries; who usually like to run and spread the ball out mixed their game up with some pinpoint kicks deep behind; while the ‘Well didn’t have that as an option and regularly had to run the ball out of deep.

While Skerries dominated territory, it remained scoreless for the opening fifteen minutes. The ‘Well worked hard with Cuprian Jouve foraging at the breakdown; managing to win a penalty while Graham Lawlor consistently carried strongly. On the other side; Skerries were came close with a break from Mark Oliver but his pass was knocked on,.

Eventually; the deadlock was broken. As Ryan Buckley foraged forward he got slightly isolated and with Skerries players prowling around him; he was penalised for holding on. Paul O’Loughlen; who was controlling the flow of the game for the North Dublin side slotted over a penalty from 30 metres out.

At the set-pieces; the strong wind was playing havoc with the line-outs; as both sides were pulled up for crooked line-outs. Skerries looked to pressurise the throw at the front with the first man jumping with a single lifter behind. At scrums; the ‘Well seemed to be on top when they were allowed developed; with Ian Murphy driving hard and they did manage to produce one great shove to win a scrum against the head. However; several times they were penalised probably harshly before the ball was put-in; with the wet turf making it difficult for players to keep their feet.

From one penalty at a scrum O’Loughlen booted the ball right up the five-metre line from half-way. Skerries managed to cleanly secure the ball from the line-out and produced a strong controlled maul with Paddy Fay-Watt touching down. O’Loughlen’s touch-line conversion just sneaked over by the far-post; with those two points proving crucial in the final out-come.

The ‘Well did have some moments of promise in attack; with the most notable break coming from the powerhouse of John Barry; who burst his way through the Skerries defence like a flying winger. Eoin Geary followed up with a strong run but the move finally broke down.

Skerries managed one more penalty before the break to establish a strong 13-0 at the break.

The ‘Well came out with renewed purpose in the second-half. Early defensive pressure led to a penalty; but Brian Derham’s effort went just wide of the near-post. The two wingers; James Kiernan and Robert O’Keeffe were dangerous throughout while also being very strong in defence and started to make inroads.

The ‘Well looked particularly threatening when they managed to secure turnover possession.  On the hour mark; one such phase allowed Graham Lawlor and Conor O’Brien forage forward. Geary followed up with an incisive run in the 22 as the ‘Well got within metres of the line. They pressed hard and won a penalty; using the advantage to switch the ball out to the opposite wing with some crisp passing allowing O’Keeffe to finish off the move in the Dolphin clubhouse corner. Derham’s conversion; from a very difficult angle just fell short of the post; whereas O’Loughlen’s effort from slightly closer in just sneaked over.

A few minutes later; again, attacking from deep Brian Derham burst his way up to the opposition ten metre line and a soft pop-pass saw O’Keeffe run a great running-line to receive the ball and bring the play deep inside the 22. The ‘Well maintained the momentum and kept powering forward with Michael Moynihan making a great burst forward and eventually Lawlor was able to make his way over the line. Derham converted and left just a solitary point between the teams.

This led to a fascinating and compelling closing ten minutes. Skerries started off by going on the attack and had a chance to close the game off as they foraged close to the line. The ‘Well defended stoutly with great discipline and eventually the work of the likes of Joshua Barnes allowed them clear their lines.

They had to show patience before finally going back on the attack with an inspirational O’Keeffe probably making his best run of the game. As he was tight to the touch-line with three Skerries defenders around him; but was able to use his pace and power and spatial awareness to burst past them and then cut inside; managing to recycle the ball in the process. The ‘Well pressed hard and at one stage there were big shouts for a penalty in front of the posts as opposition players seem to be lying over the ball but nothing came. Eventually the move just broke down and Skerries recovered possession to close out the game.

**Scorers: Sunday’s Well:** R O’Keeffe, G Lawlor tries; B Derham con.

**Skerries:** P Fay-Watt try; P O’Louhghlen 2 pens, con.

**Sunday’s Well:** B Derham; J Kiernan, E Geary (c), R Buckley, R O’Keeffe; J Featherstone, B Pope; I Murphy, J Barry, E O’Connell; J Barnes, S Desmond; C Kelliher, C Jouve, C O’Brien. **Replacements:** G O’Sullivan,N O’Donoghue, G Lawlor,  J Barrett, J Ruiz Herrera.

**Skerries:** L Jones; M Oliver, K McGrath, D Lowndes, C Lennox; P O’Loughlen, E Carron; C Marrey, C.A. Marrey, J Sherwin; T O’Hare, P Fay-Watt; M Turvey, B Jenkinson, R McAuley. **Replacements:** K Leonard, C Murphy, E Sherlock, R Woods, O McKey.

**Referee:** J Flynn (IRFU)