

Oakham 1st Xv v Long Buckby 1st XV Saturday 8th September 2018

With a new coaching team in place, headed up by Alun meadows, and lots of new faces in the team line-up, the Oaks were eagerly anticipating the first game of the new season.

Oakham had the wind at their backs as Long Buckby kicked off the new season. The early exchanges being typical of a first game with both sides playing at a hectic pace resulting in frequent handling errors in the initial exchanges.

Oakham settled first on the ten-minute mark as quick hands created space for Will Armstrong to weave his way upfield, however the final pass did not go to hand and the promising attack broke down. Oakham started to settle down, getting the better of the lineouts and retaining possession to give some continuity. Long Buckby's rush defence were then penalised for offside, Callum Crellin converting the penalty from 35 metres to give Oakham the lead after 15 minutes.

The Oaks pressurised their opponents into a further series of penalties at the ruck, enabling them to progress upfield before finally kicking to touch with an Oakham lineout five metres out from the Buckby line. The lineout was overthrown but the alert Angus Collett snapped up the loose ball at the back of the lineout to drive over for a try, converted by Crellin, stretching Oakham's lead to 10-0 with twenty-three minutes played. The Oaks were beginning to dominate possession and were starting to create chances but Buckby defended aggressively, forcing Oakham into hurried decisions and unable to turn their possession into points. Buckby were again penalised resulting in Callum Crellin putting his side further ahead with a well struck kick. 13-0.

In the last moments of the first half Oakham paid the penalty for some sloppy defending as Buckby's full back sliced through the Oaks midfield defence before rounding several tacklers to score under the posts, fortunately for Oakham, Buckby failed to convert their try leaving the Oaks ahead 13-5 at half time.

Buoyed by their success at the end of the first half Buckby continued to force errors from an Oakham side who were trying to play fast open rugby, but the continuity was not quite there as they tried to force passes which weren't really on. Oakham finally put several phases together as they camped on the Buckby line. James Beanland came close before setting up the ruck, Charlie McKie then picked up from the back and forced his way over for the try, the conversion being missed making the score 18-5, eight minutes into the second half.

Oakham were now on top but, despite putting themselves in good positions, the final ball was still going astray far too often for coach Alun Meadows liking. Oakham stretched their lead further when, after eighteen minutes, a series of Oakham forward drives close to the Buckby line were followed by centre Jonno Milnes taking a short ball to force his way over, converted by Callum Crellin 25-5.

At this stage, although not playing with much fluency, Oakham were continuing to breach the Buckby defence and it looked to be only a matter of time before they added to the score line. Oakham again worked their way into the Buckby twenty-two, switching play several times between forwards and backs, before full back Callum Crellin weaved his way over for the bonus point try. The conversion was missed leaving Oakham ahead 30-5 and ten minutes to go. However, it was Buckby who struck back as they created another chance for their rapid full back to outpace the Oakham defence and score again, the conversion being missed making the score 30-10.

Oakham tried to increase their scores but with the drizzle settling in wet and slippery conditions meant lots of dropped passes and lack of continuity in the closing minutes. At the final whistle the score remained 30-10.

Oakham coach Alun Meadows reflected on a good win but knows there more will be needed from the team once they have settled down. It was a typical first game of the season, in which over eagerness, combined with several new faces unfamiliar with patterns of play, played a large part in some of the disjointed play.

Angus Collett was awarded the sponsors man of the match for a fine all-round performance.