

## **Market Harborough RFC 1<sup>st</sup> XV 64 Oakham RFC 1<sup>st</sup> XV 43**

Following their impressive home win last week Oakham suffered a mixture of unavailability and injuries that, not for the first time this season, forced coach Alun meadows to revamp his team selection. Not ideal when travelling away to an in form second -placed Market Harborough.

On a dry day Oakham kicked off playing with the breeze behind them. Within five minutes Oakham took the lead as Callum Crellin kicked a penalty from 40 metres out 3-0. Oakham saw a promising move break down as the ball was spilled. Then, from what looked a situation posing no threat, Harborough's left-wing Basra scooped up the ball, broke through the defence, kicked ahead and regathered the ball for a well taken converted try 3-7. Oakham were then hit with two tries in quick succession. First a loose Oakham pass was picked up by Harborough's excellent scrum half Purnell, bursting through several tackles before wrong footing full back Will Armstrong to score under the posts 14-3. Followed rapidly with some excellent offloading and support play by Harborough to cross for another try 21-3 with barely 20 minutes played. It was looking ominous for Oakham as they lost flanker Ben Turnbull and prop Ed McFarlane in quick succession

However, Oakham were undaunted and, following a series of forward drives, replacement Jaime Ray forced his way over for a try, converted by Crellin 21-10. Sam Janes then pinnied Harborough deep into their twenty-two with a searching kick. From the lineout Oakham drove at the line before moving the ball to the backs. Fly half Alex Laybourne then slipped a lovely pass to prop Rhys Grieve who galloped through the gap to the line. The try converted by Crellin, 21-17 with 27 minutes played. Oakham were right back in the game. Harborough then stopped the visitor's momentum with another excellent try, showing some crisp handling for wing Basra to outpace the Oakham defence and cross in at the corner for an unconverted try 26-17. The Oaks were then again caught napping as Harborough's electric scrum half, Purnell, weaved his way past several Oakham tacklers before leaving Will Armstrong clutching thin air as he side-stepped past him for a converted try. 33-17 and still five minutes to go to half time. The Oaks, showing great resilience, responded with a try of their own. A lightening break by scrum half Crellin saw him stopped just short of the line. The ball was recycled and Laybourne, seeing wing Kieran Hatcher- Devlin in space, kicked wide for the young wing to catch the ball whilst running at full pace for a brilliant try, converted from wide out by Crellin, to close the first half 33-24. The large crowd of spectators had been treated to some brilliant attacking rugby from both sides albeit, according to some old heads in the crowd, helped by some questionable tackling, but all spectators wanting more of the same after the break.

From the kick-off Harborough again put the visitors under pressure before, not for the first time, their scrum half Purnell broke through before eventually being halted, the ball was recycled for their left-wing Basra to accelerate away for his third converted try 40-24. Barely ten minutes into the second half Oakham fell further behind, a missed tackle allowed a simple break by their centre who then accelerated away for another try 45-24. A determined Oakham hit back yet again as, following a series of forward attacks, scrum half Crellin floated a long pass to wing Kieran Hatcher Devlin who somehow squeezed over in the corner 45-29. Harborough were in no mood to allow Oakham back into the game and, following yet another break in the centre, left wing Basra was on hand to add his fourth try, well converted taking the score to 52-29.

At the kick off Callum Crellin spotted space on the right, switched his low kick off and Oakham right wing Hatcher Devlin seized on the kick off, making a great run before being tackled just short. The

ball was recycled through the forwards several times before scrum half Crellin spotted a gap at the breakdown and dived over for a converted try 52-36. This only stung Harborough into action again as, from a scrum twenty-five metres out, their number eight broke right and galloped unopposed to the posts for another converted score 57- 36.

In response and not to be outdone, Oakham produced a fine handling move of their own which almost saw captain Will Armstrong to the line before being brought down just short. Oakham quickly moved the ball to centre Jonno Milnes who stepped past two tacklers before crossing for a converted try. 57-43. Remarkably with still ten minutes to go another Oakham score would see them in losing bonus point territory with a score of fifty points. ! Sadly for Oakham, Harborough's had the final say as, from a scrum, simple passing along the backline created an overlap for wing Basra to evade Will Armstrong's despairing tackle and score his fifth try making the final score 64-43

Nobody from the large crowd of spectators could remember a game where over a hundred points had been scored and one side had scored 43 points and lost. A great feast of attacking rugby for the spectators was provided by both teams but both coaches were left to ponder some of the defending.

**Oakham** 1-Grieve,2-Stimson,3-McFarlane,4-Watkins,5-Thraves,6-Turnbull,7-Mitchell,8-Beanland,9-Crellin C,10-Laybourne,11-Hatcher devlin,12-Janes,13-Milnes,14-McKee,15-Armstrong. 16-Rawlinson,17-Ray,18-Crellin L.