

Bugbrooke 1st XV 29 Oakham 1st XV 30 - Saturday 1st December 2018

Another week and another much changed side as the Oaks were hit by late cry-offs. Despite the constant team changes, recent results had pointed to steady progress being made. With today's opponents, Bugbrooke, sitting comfortably in mid-table an away win for the Oaks looked, on paper, to be a tough ask.

Despite the heavy morning rain, the pitch was in good condition and the light breeze blowing across the pitch was not favouring either side. From the kick-off Oakham made some good ground before spilling the ball in the tackle. Bugbrooke seized on the loose ball and, after a couple of forward drives, managed to work an overlap for their quick, elusive right wing to show his paces as he evaded several tacklers on his way for the opening score, well converted, giving the hosts a 7-0 lead with less than five minutes on the clock.

Oakham hit back from the restart as Stee Vukinanvanua and Ed Balmford made good ground before Bugbrooke were penalised. Callum Crellin struck the kick through the posts to narrow the deficit to 7-3. Oakham were finding it difficult to maintain possession as they constantly lost possession whereas their opponents tested the Oaks defence whenever they had the ball. Oakham were testing the patience of the referee as he gave a string of penalties to Bugbrooke., fortunately for Oakham none of the resulting kicks at goal were translated into points.

Oakham were starting to get a foothold in the game but then, and not for the first time this season, an aimless kick into midfield enabled Bugbrooke to run the ball back, moving left then switching play right for their dangerous winger to outflank the Oaks defence and sprint clear, crossing in the corner before rounding to score near the posts. 14-3.

The Oaks then seized the game as they drove at the Bugbrooke defence, Stee Vukinavanua and Ed Balford once again making good ground before Will Armstrong took the move on only to be tackled just short. From the ensuing scrum No 8 Ed Balmford broke from the base before flipping the ball up to scrum half Callum Crellin who dove over for a try 14-8.

Oakham were now playing with some confidence and with five minutes plus injury time to go were awarded a penalty. Callum Crellin kicked to touch on the opposition twenty-two. The Oaks won the lineout and moved the ball infield, Vukinavanua and Balmford again getting ground across the gain line before flanker Dan Sanderson drove through the defence to score, converted by Crellin to put the Oaks ahead 14-15.

With the first half deep into injury time Oakham contrived to lose the ball when attempting to run out of their own twenty-two. Bugbrooke then set up a series of drives, close to the visitor's line, however Oakham somehow managed to win turnover ball. The clearing kick was charged down with the loose ball was seized on by Bugbrooke to score an unconverted try. 19-15 at half time.

Oakham had it all to do in the second half and started brightly by driving out of their twenty-two before an intended off load was intercepted. Bugbooke quickly moved the ball wide to, who else but, their flying wing who set off down the touchline, stepping past several tackles on his way to the try line for his third try 24-15.

Oakham were in danger of letting their opponents get away from them but another barnstorming run from Vukinavanua set up a position for Will Armstrong to cut through the defence to score, bringing the Oaks right back into the game. 24-20.

It was becoming very tense but, once again, Oakham conceded a try as Bugbrooke's winger again found some space, skating past defenders on his way to the line 29-20.

The Oaks gathered themselves again and forced themselves with a series of pick and drives ever closer to the Bugbrooke line. It was now Bugbrooke's turn to concede penalties as they desperately fought to keep Oakham out. From a penalty replacement Jaime Bullet took a quick tap and managed to put Ed Balmford over for an unconverted try. 29-25.

The match was going into injury time as Oakham laid siege to the Bugbrooke line again. However, the hosts were repelling everything that Oakham could throw at them and with time running out it looked as though the Oaks had run out of ideas. One last wave of forward drives finally sucked in enough Bugbrooke defenders to create an overlap for Oakham's wing to score in the corner, the difficult conversion was missed to leave the Oaks ahead 29-30 with two minutes of injury time left. That two minutes seemed to last forever, with the Oakham supporters getting increasingly nervous as Bugbrooke attempted to run the ball. The attack was finally halted by Oakham as their pack crucially managed to turn the ball over at the breakdown, the ball was quickly re-cycled to Callum Crellin who gleefully kicked it out of play as the final whistle blew.

A great team effort by Oakham to secure a very hard-fought away win 29-30