

## **Oakham 1<sup>st</sup> Xv v Coalville 1<sup>st</sup> XV Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2018**

The annual Christmas pre-match festivities, with over 140 past players and members attending a three-course lunch, was guaranteed to create a large crowd for this, the last home game before Christmas. Oakham were hoping to repeat and build on their winning performance of last week. Conditions were good but both teams were having to cope with a stiff breeze blowing straight down the pitch.

The Oaks kicked off into the wind in the first half with both teams testing defences in the early exchanges. Oakham attempting to use their forwards with rapid pick and drives whereas Coalville preferring to use their offloading game to create space for their backs.

A forward drive, with Ed Balmford and Stee Vukinavanua to the fore, saw the Oaks make ground into the Coalville twenty-two before the visitors conceded a penalty at the breakdown. Callum Crellin converting allowing the Oaks to edge in front 3-0 after ten minutes. Coalville levelled the scores five minutes later as their scrum half tested and probed the Oakham defence, orchestrating several drives before spotting a gap before bursting through to score a fine individual unconverted try 3-8

Oakham were still very much in the game as the forwards, led by Stee Vukinavanua and Ed Balmford, drove Coalville back towards their twenty-two. Under pressure, Coalville conceded a penalty which was kicked to the corner by Oakham. Winning the lineout Oakham drove towards the line before opening the ball up to the backs. Using Vukinavanua as a decoy the gap was created for Callum Crellin to dart through and level the scores with an unconverted try 8-8. Oakham then saw out a period of sustained pressure from the visitors with determined defence by the Oaks preventing Coalville going ahead before the referee blew for half time.

Having kept the visitors' level in the first half and now playing with the wind, the Oaks were looking to build a lead and win the game in the second half. Coalville, however, had other ideas and, following a missed tackle by Oakham in the centre, quickly found themselves in space behind the Oaks defence. An unopposed run to the line by their centre was stopped just short by a great covering tackle but the Coalville player still managed to stretch over to score. The try was well converted against the wind leaving Oakham trailing 8-15 with barely two minutes played.

Oakham were undaunted by the early setback and launched another forward drive resulting in Coalville conceding a penalty, Crellin kicking to within ten metres of the visitor's line. After winning the ensuing lineout the Oaks forwards attempted to rumble over but were prevented by the visitors conceding another penalty. Beanland took a quick tap and powered his way over near the posts for Crellin to convert 15-15. Both sides looked dangerous with ball in hand and the game was becoming a matter of which defence would prove the stronger.

Fifteen minutes into the half Coalville struck again as they pushed the Oaks back with a series of forward drives, sucking the cover in before moving the ball to the centre who crossed for the try. A great conversion against the wind saw them edge ahead 15-22.

Oakham were not deterred and, surprisingly ignoring the strong wind advantage, continued with their effective but energy sapping forward pick and drive tactic. This eventually paid off as they sucked the opposition in, creating space for the backs to attack wide. Beanland made a run for the line but his clever kick through was carried over by a Coalville defender. From the scrum Vukinavanua drove towards the line before the ball was moved wide for Martyn Stimson to cross for the converted try, levelling the scores again.

Oakham then took the lead with Stee Vukinavanua and Ed Balmford driving their way towards the Coalville line. The attack looked to have run out of steam but had sucked in enough defenders as space was created in the centre for Tom burton to cross for an unconverted try 27-22.

With fifteen minutes left to play the game was still to be won and Oakham would need to cut out their unforced errors if they were to see out the game. Unfortunately, that was not to be the case as a poor Oakham kick went out on the full. From the lineout the visitors drove for the line before switching the ball left, then right to score near the posts. The added conversion putting Oakham being again at 27-29. But with ten minutes still remaining all was not lost.

Oakham then looked to have the advantage as Coalville lost a player to the sin bin. With Oakham attacking Coalville's scrum half, a constant thorn in Oakhams side, seized on a loose Oakham pass before making a clever kick through. The bouncing ball somehow evaded the Oakham defenders as the Coalville wing managed to regain possession and score in the corner. 27-34.

The game was still within Oakhams grasp, or at least a bonus point but, persisting with running the ball instead of using the wind to kick for position, a rapidly tiring Oakham played into the opposition hands. Losing possession when on the attack saw another swift counter from Coalville leading, somewhat against the run of play, to a further try. The ball was offloaded in the tackle straight to a to a Coalville player who promptly turned and scampered over the Oakham line for a converted try to make the final score 27-41.

At the whistle Oakham's players and spectators were left scratching their heads as to how the game ended up with that disappointing score line. Failing to use their 16<sup>th</sup> man, in the form of a strong wind at their backs in the second half, meant Oakham, especially the forwards who had put so much into the game, simply ran out of steam at the end.

**Oakham** Grieve, Stimson, Corner, Hopkins, Hiscocks, Balmford, Sanderson, Vukinavanua, Jeffrey, Crellin, Burton, Moxon, Milnes, Durno W, Boulton Smith **Reps** Richardson, Laybourne, Beanland.