

Oakham RFC 1st XV v Bugbrooke RFC 1st XV Saturday 23rd March 2019

Having lost their last league game combined with their rivals gaining unexpected victories Oakham found themselves next to bottom and four points adrift of the three teams above them. Welcoming Bugbrooke to the showground the hosts knew it would not be an easy task to get a victory against a side lying six places above them. Conditions were good, a sunny afternoon with a dry pitch and only a moderate breeze to contend with.

In the opening ten minutes Oakham showed some promising play as they forced Bugbrooke to defend their line with the Oaks looking for an early score. However Bugbrooke then turned over ball and quickly cleared upfield to touch. With their first bit of possession the visitors set up a driving maul before moving the ball quickly to the right wing who accelerated away rounding several would be Oakham tackles before scoring a fine individual try. The conversion was missed 0-5 with 12 minutes played.

Oakham had been warned of the pace and power evident in Bugbrooke's back three but, in trying to exit their twenty-two, a poor clearance kick went straight to Bugbrooke's danger men. A swift counter attack sent the ball to their right wing who again showed his finishing skills, leaving defenders in his wake as he cruised in for another try under the posts. The conversion making the score 0-12 after 15 minutes.

Despite this Oakham were still in the game and creating chances. Finally, after camping on the Bugbrooke line for several minutes, they worked some space for young wing Olly Moore to cut inside his man and score an unconverted try 5-12.

Oakham again went on the attack but Bugbrooke's defence held out a series of drives close to their line and then, as on previous occasions, eventually turning the ball over and kicking deep downfield in to Oakham territory. There looked to be no danger as two Oakham players went for the ball but Bugbrooke's left wing, following up at pace, somehow found space to nip in between them, scooping the ball up to cross for an unconverted try in the corner 5-17. Bugbrooke were now getting on top and looked dangerous whenever their backs had the ball. They again made inroads deep into the Oakham twenty-two before their scrum half cleverly chipped over the advancing Oakham backline for their centre to run onto the ball and score a converted try near the posts. 5-24 just before half time.

The Oaks knew they were up against it but started the second half in well as they camped within ten metres of the Bugbrooke line. Despite valiant efforts they did not look to have the cutting edge to break the Bugbrooke defence. Once again, a familiar patten emerged as the Oaks were penalised at the breakdown. This handed Bugbrooke an opportunity to kick deep into Oakham territory. From the lineout they moved the ball into midfield and their centre cut back inside to carve the Oakham defence open and score under the posts. 5-31. It looked all over for Oakham barring a Scotland like recovery, however the players still believed something could be salvaged.

The revival started with Oakham again dominating a scrum close to the Bugbrooke line without taking full advantage as the forwards tried to force their way over before eventually spinning it wide for Tom Moxon to cross for a converted try 12-31 with twenty minutes left to play. Oakham spirits were further dampened when they concede yet another penalty which Bugbrooke converted 12-34.

Undaunted Oakham attacked again but Bugbrooke held out before eventually Ryan Corner forced his way over for a vital score, converted by Callum Crellin 19-34 and ten minutes still to play.

It looked to be too little too late but, with the crowd suddenly waking up that something might be on the cards, saw Oakham came full tilt at Bugbrooke who, almost England like were starting to miss tackles and suddenly appeared flustered. Oakham with their dominant scrum to the fore again created more attacking space out to the right but couldn't make it to the line. Following a series of rucks Ben Turnbull finally drove over for a fine try. The conversion was missed but Oakham had hauled themselves back into the game 34-24. Five minutes to play.

The Oaks were now sensing something special as, with one last effort the mighty Stee Vukinavua, who had run himself nearly to a standstill, summoned up the energy to crash through the Bugbrooke defence one more time and from thirty yards out sped away to the line, leaving would be tacklers in his wake for a brilliant individual try under the posts. Converted by Callum Crellin 31-34.

By this time with only minutes left the disbelieving spectators sensed a remarkable victory may be possible as they urged the players on for one last big effort. Oakham were then awarded a penalty thirty metres out and Callum Crellin coolly slotted the kick to draw the sides level.

Two minutes to go plus injury time – could Oakham conjure up one last effort and snatch the victory. Unfortunately not as, in their desperation to win the ball at a ruck, they conceded a penalty thirty-five metres out which the Bugbrooke scrum-half duly converted to make the score 34-37. Oakham players slumped to the ground as the final whistle went but, despite the loss, had earned two vital bonus points which looked very unlikely at half time and might yet prove crucial in the final run in.