

Long Buckby RFC 1st XV v Oakham RFC 1st XV Saturday 13th April 2019

Long Buckby played hosts to Oakham last Saturday in a “winner takes all” game. Buckby were sitting just above the Oaks in a group of three teams on 41 points whilst Oakham were lying immediately below them in the relegation zone on 37 points. Oakham knew that only a bonus point win, gaining them five points, would be good enough to survive the drop.

The game kicked off with Oakham playing down the slope and into a stiff breeze and went straight away on the attack from the kick off, pinning Buckby deep into their twenty-two with some good attacking support play. Enjoying plenty of possession in the first ten minutes but, despite hammering away at the Buckby line, Oakham could not find the cutting edge to break the Buckby defence to secure, what may have been, a vital opening score. Buckby then broke the siege as the Oaks conceded a penalty and the chance was gone. A theme that was to continue throughout most of the game. The Oaks were soon to pay the price for failing to score as, with their first attack of the game, Buckby broke through the Oakham defence and only a deliberate knock on by Callum Crellin prevented what would probably have been an opening score. Crellin was duly sin-binned and Buckby kicked the penalty 3-0 with twelve minutes played.

Down to fourteen men Oakham fell into an all too familiar pattern by falling foul of the referee, being constantly penalised, and allowing Buckby to take control of the game. With eighteen minutes gone, following yet another penalty, Buckby took full advantage kicking another penalty to the corner then won the lineout and drove over for a converted try 10-0. Despite their set piece scrum and lineout going well the Oaks were struggling to retain possession at the breakdown. Then, on the half hour mark, the Oaks got back into the game working their way into the opposition twenty-two. With their scrum dominant Buckby conceded three scrum penalties. Oakham eight opted to scrum each time then at the last scrum quickly moved the ball right for Tom Easson to force his way over for a try, converted by Callum Crellin 10-7. The game was now finely poised.

Oakham continued to press but could not make inroads through the Buckby defence, the hosts holding on to their lead at half time 10-7

The second-half started with Oakham using the wind to peg their opponents back but the referee continued to warn and penalise Oakham at the breakdown, frustrating the players and preventing continuity in their play. With 15 minutes gone the referee’s patience eventually wore thin and John Mitchell was sent to the bin for ten minutes. With three consecutive penalties Buckby then worked their way upfield to a five-metre lineout. The subsequent catch and drive by their heavy pack resulting in a converted try 17-7. Buckby then took full advantage of Oakham being a man short as they stretched their lead almost immediately, slicing through the Oakham defence in the centre before scoring an unconverted try in the corner 22-7. It was now looking like an uphill task for the Oaks to win the game from this position, but Oakham stuck to their task and still made ground when

they had possession. Buckby were to go further ahead with fifteen minutes still to go to finally dash any hopes of an Oakham fight back, intercepting an Oakham pass before crossing under the posts for a converted try 29-7. Oakham then suffered yet another injury blow as wing Ollie Moore was stretchered off with a dislocated ankle, requiring a further reshuffle of the Oakham backline. Buckby then sealed their victory as, from yet another penalty, they won a lineout ten metres out and drove the Oakham pack over their line for an unconverted try 34- 7 with less than ten minutes to go.

Oakham then gathered themselves for a last effort, determined to finish the season on a high, following a fine break by centre Jonno Mills which created space for James Beanland to score an unconverted try 34-12.

From the kick off Oakham again made good ground, resulting in Ben Turnbull squeezing over for a last-minute try, converted by Callum Crellin, making the final score 34-17.

Long Buckby celebrated their survival as Oakham were left to contemplate life in a lower division next season and the missed opportunities early in the game which may have changed things. For the second week running, the Oaks played twenty minutes of the game with fourteen men as a result of two separate yellow cards. During that time their opponents scored three tries and that, in the final analysis, was the main difference between the two teams at the final whistle

The season has not been all doom and gloom, several youngsters were introduced to first team rugby during the season and gained valuable experience which will stand them in good stead next season. If the Oaks can also get back some of their long-term injured players it will give them the opportunity to regroup for next season.

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