

‘GUYS FAILURE TO RAM HOME MAN ADVANTAGE COSTS DEARLY’

14th September 2002:

London and South East 4: Bognor Regis 18 – 8 Guys Hospital

In the cutthroat world of sport, the use of two words can feed our imaginations and highlight how it could have been. ‘If only’ are words that can make our sporting results so much easier to bear in the light of being able to visualize what could have been the end result. The difference though between the good sides and the great sides, between winning and losing, between death and glory is the use of those two monosyllabic expressions of forlorn hope. If only Guys had won more ball, if only they had taken their chances, if only they had taken advantage more of playing a man superior. The better sides simply don’t need to say those words, they don’t need to grasp on to hope. They visualize what can happen and make it work. If Guys are serious about competing for the league this season, they need to lose their inhibitions, stop making excuses and in the words of a Giant sports company’s advertising campaign, ‘just do it’.

And so it was against this backdrop that Guys made the long trip down to the South Coast. It was away to the much fancied Bognor side that Guys were drawn to play the opening league fixture of the season. Pre season favorites for the title, Bognor are a strong side that many teams will struggle against this year. Guys however, although still awaiting the return of many of their regular players from the summer break, put up a brave fight and at times played some scintillating and adroit rugby.

A reshuffle in the pack saw Berry promoted to openside (the Eighth position he has played for guys in two seasons), and Smith back in his more familiar role at Number Eight. The game also featured a solid debut for regular 2nd XV prop Dave Axton. Nevertheless, despite the reshuffle and against the heftier Bognor pack, Guys competed well in the loose for much of the game, and tackled fiercely around the fringes. Clinton, Smith and Llewelyn in particular making their weight felt. Forages into the Bognor half were limited but some chances did come. A well worked back line move almost put Berry into some space, and wingers Breeze and Etok were handed an occasional burst. Bognor’s territorial advantage though soon took its toll as they eased their first kickable penalty between the uprights for a 3-0 lead. Bognor attempted to push home their advantage with the high ball, but full back Pat Gush more than met the onslaught. On one memorable moment, Gush got himself out of trouble with the most outrageously beautiful sidestep out of the Dave Duckham school of rugby that seemed to fool both teams, referee, supporters and the like. Guys were buoyed, and in rare forage into enemy territory, picked up a penalty after good work by the back row.

It was however, with the game seemingly on a knife-edge that Berry, toiling away unswervingly for much of the afternoon in his unfamiliar position, stupidly managed to talk himself to ten minutes in the sin bin. After which, Bognor took advantage of to take a 10-3 lead into half time with a slick move down the blindside.

The second half response though was good from Guys. Despite a serious lack of ball, strong running and good handling kept the ball alive and gaps were found on many occasions. Both Chinye and Turner made strong runs, Chinye in particular left both teams for dead as he made a very swift 70 yard run for the corner only to be tackled just short of the line. Indeed, Guys played some patches of rugby that seemed to have come from the Gods themselves as the ball was kept alive and the full width of the pitch was used. But these patches of play could not be sustained. The jumper could not be found in the lineout consistently, and the ball was lost against the head in the scrum. Tough tackling by the backrow and a couple of turnovers in the loose by Berry and Llewelyn, ensured the Bognor threat was boxed up

locally. But a relentless wave of Bognor attacks soon ensured the collapse of the Guys seemingly solid defence as their big men crashed over for the second try of the match to go 15-3 into the lead.

Guys were back in the game though almost immediately after an all too rare excursion in to the Bognor 22. Turner took the ball from a ruck on the wing and after coming inside managed to find a gap large enough for his backside to squeeze through to power over to take the score to 15-8. The game was there for the taking, and the opportunity presented itself further when the Bognor tighthead tried to intimidate Richard Clinton with a head butt as the scrum engaged. Right in front of the referee, and after a series of front row clashes, the man in the middle waved the red card and Bognor were a man down. Lady luck was surely smiling down on Guys. This was the time to ram home the advantage and take all the points. Paradoxically though, it was Bognor who rallied, and in an impressive show played the last fifteen minutes harder than before. Guys never once managed to get out of their own half. Under constant pressure, Guys were forced to shield surge after surge from the Bognor forwards. Lineouts were lost and scrums turned over. It was a nightmare last ten minutes of the game. Although Bognor only managed to gain an extra three points for all their work, Guys had nothing substantial to offer.

It was a disappointing end to what should have been a good away win against one of the strongest outfits in the league. Guys are better rugby players man for man than all the teams in this league. They try to play better rugby, they play with a fantastic spirit, but if they want silverware, Guys must emulate the performance of the Bognor XIV. It's time for guys to stop being soft and start playing some hard fast rugby again.

TEAM: R. Clinton, B. Wheeler, D. Axton, K. Rowland, B. Thorpe, W. Llewelyn, C. Smith, D. Berry, T. Price (c), R. Turner, N. Chanye, R. Breeze, R. Etok, P. Gush (E. Behn)

TRY: Turner

PENALTY: Price

JUNIPER: Berry, Nurse, Price