

Match report: GKT 2 17-10 Portsmouth 3. 11-10-2006.

It was with quiet anticipation and excitement that I approached the game against Portsmouth 3's on Wednesday 11th, The team on paper was immense and the prospects looked good for a thrilling victory. However as is often the way in rugby, games are not won by reputation and a team that comes with the hunger to win can sometimes cause a dreadful upset, had it not been for some fortunate calls and a bit of grit when faced with adversity, that could very easily have happened in this game.

Kick off was delayed past the scheduled time because Portsmouth got caught in traffic on the way to Honor Oak park. This meant that the warm up was drawn out and we went into the game well prepared whilst Portsmouth had literally got off the bus to find themselves thrust into game almost immediately. They won the toss and chose to kick off and after a team talk and a squeeze we prepared to receive the ball.

A dropped ball from the kick off by ginger Sam got the game off to a jerky start but from the scrum we went straight at them and the ferocity defence was such that we were in their 22 and hadn't even touched the ball. For the first 10 minutes we really went at them and it seemed that all predictions of handing out a hefty defeat would come true. However a frustrating lack of support at the ruck and some silly errors meant that the breakthrough didn't come.

As always, support is crucial at the ruck, even the most excellent sides cannot perform without the ball, however when we did get the ball we did look dangerous. It was certainly a deserved lead when, half way through the first half, the forwards drove over from a throw in, that had been the result of a penalty. The try was not converted but we were glad of the breakthrough.

The game had always been bitty, and this was giving vent to some silly errors and handbags from both sides. The boot was seen put in by Pompey a few times by the ref and some penalties were overturned as a result, and instead of rising above it, we were guilty of trying a few afters too. The referee governed the game reasonably and it has to be said that his elected linesman Mr John Men Donka helped the referee with distinction throughout.

The jubilation of the lead was short-lived. Sloppy defence allowed Portsmouth to grab a cheeky try before half time. We were looking at heading into half time drawing in a game in which we should have been dominating, however it seemed that relief was at hand when a flowing move ended with the ball being played out wide and captain Harry Gasper slid over to guarantee his ruin and make the score 10-0 (the try was not converted).

We always knew that Portsmouth would come back at us, but this did not seem to make any difference to the way we defended and it seemed like the nightmare could be upon us as Portsmouth went over in the second half to make it 10-10, our lack of fitness began to show as our moves lacked penetration and the support play was sluggish. Changes were made to try and bring fresh legs in.

Having said up to this point that play was disappointing, it is fair to mention now that there were good points, certainly in the second half we began to dominate the game and Portsmouth did not look like scoring for a long while. However the winning try was still elusive, despite the desperation of Guys to find it, including Jamie's' undeniable commitment as he dived into my boot on the try line.

It seemed like it may not have been our day, decisions were turning against us and the momentum was changing hands. However every player tried their hardest to keep it up and everyone kept their cool. Fresher Sam deserves a mention at this point as he led the defence with vigour and was admirably in the loose.

The coolness was best demonstrated in the lineout, which was outstanding in the second half, every lineout was ours including the opposition, thanks to the great work from Imran and Simon Garrard. Finally, with not long to go a smart move from the backs saw a huge gap open for Ashley who strolled over and put the ball between the posts. Toby completed the conversion and we knew that all we had to do was defend for 4 minutes and we would win.

Of course we spent that last 4 minutes on our own try line and it was here that the true spirit of guys was awakened, stout defending on the line and, once again, cool heads in the lineout saw us keep them out and steal two of their lines to see us through to the final whistle and seal the victory.

The victory was not a good one, but it is important to take the positives. We are a side who is yet to gel and some changes will be made to try and smooth out the wrinkles. However there is no doubt that the commitment was evident in every player. As our fitness improves we will be able to remove some of the silly errors and move on. Some excellent debuts were had, and almost had by fresher's, notably John at hooker, Sam flanking and Marcus at centre. There was also an excellent turnout and those who missed out on a debut opportunity will get their chance. If we can play like that and still win, think what we will do when we play well.