

Crowborough RFC 1st XV 45 v's Folkestone RFC 1st XV 6

Forced to play this postponed match at the earliest available weekend, Crowborough welcomed Folkestone to Steel Cross on the opening day of the “six nations” with several regulars and the coaching staff already committed to being at Rugby HQ for the day.

A hastily reorganised team that featured Russell at #7, Atkin at #10 and Brooker at #15, were given the instructions by stand in coach Martin to “ just do the simple things well and enjoy the game”.

There was no score for the first 15 minutes as both sides tested the resolve of the other, with ‘boro getting the best of the initial encounters but unable to break down the large Folkestone pack. From a ruck outside the ‘boro 22, Leyland was quickly up on the centre but penalised for tackling the man without the ball, and the three points was a mere formality.0-3

Brooker, taking responsibility for organising what has been on occasions a porous defence in recent weeks, marshalled a solid back three whose alignment not only put doubt in the mind of the Folkestone #10 as to where or whether to kick, but created a launch pad for all three to make searing incursions into the line whilst still maintaining shape.

This gave the side confidence to take the ball to the opposition, and it was not long before the first response from Crowborough which followed a loose ball that bounced between Atkin and Gordon , was swept up by Walters on the half way line, who seeing a miniscule gap scythed his way through his own pack before rounding the opposing centres. Faced with just the full back to beat, but with support in attendance, he took the tackle and off loaded to Kendry for the try, which Palmer converted 7-3.

Crowborough had an immediate chance to go further ahead, when, in a three minute period they firstly eschewed the opportunity of three points, for the try, but lost the subsequent line out, and again within seconds, having done all the hard work, dropped the ball with the line begging and the ball scabbled into touch. From the line out Richardson tapped the ball to Bissett, and as the forwards parted a fraction, Bissett saw the briefest of gaps, and bursting through rounded his opposite number, stepped inside the winger, and as the line approached took the full back with him to touch down for a try which Palmer converted 14-3.

With eight minutes of injury time played and with Crowborough penned in their own 22, some excellent forward defensive work kept the strong Folkestone pack at bay. However every time ‘Boro had the opportunity to clear their line, despite the strong wind in their favour, and for seven consecutive kicks, the ball refused to go into touch, allowing Folkestone simply to put the ball back with interest and set up another maul. Eventually the pressure told and a penalty for off side in front of the posts brought the half to a close with the score 14-6.

From the kick off and with Crowborough playing with the wind, and Atkin gaining confidence with every touch, put the ball long into the Folkestone 22, and Palmer following up at speed tackled the full back, and although the resulting ruck was won by Folkestone, the clearance missed touch and the covering Leyland juggled the ball before flipping it to Palmer who having made ten metres off loaded to Russell who barged his way to the line for a well deserved try. The conversion was missed 19-6.

With confidence growing , and playing with smiles on their faces, the 'Boro pack realised that their opposite numbers had given all that they could, and started to push the big pack backwards at every set scrum and broke through any remaining and crumbling resistance almost at will. As Gordon picked up at #8 and with the support of Martyn and Leyland down the blind side the three made fully 40 metres before being halted, but from the resulting ruck, Bissett fed Atkin who passed to Jackson bursting in from the blind, and as the ball was passed along the line up popped Russell to take an inside pass and crash over in the corner for a well worked try. The conversion was superbly slotted by Palmer to take the score to 26-6

With 'Boro now running rampant and with decisive lines being run by Jackson, Palmer and Brooker keeping the Folkestone defence honest, further scores were inevitable. From a 22 drop out Russell fielded the ball, and with a mighty hand-off and help from the pack drove the ball back into the 22, and as the ball was recycled, Needs was on hand to take the pass and sprint for the line to score the try that was converted by Palmer 33-6.

Folkestone were now clearly out on their feet and as the #10 restarted with a short kick to the blind side, Jackson got a boot to it and chased the ball down to the Folkestone 22. As the 'boro pack arrived in force, the ball was recycled and as Atkin put the backs away, unselfishly both Needs and Walters who could have scored, passed the ball to Brooker, who entered the line at speed and crashed over the line out wide. The kick went unconverted 38-6.

Several more clear scoring opportunities went begging, through poor passing and catching, before Leyland was judged to be held up over the line. From the five metre scrum Bissett took the wheeling ball, side stepped the cover and dived over for his second on the day which was converted by Palmer to bring the match to an end, with a final score of 45-6, which moves Crowborough into third place in the league.

This Saturday 9th Feb Crowborough welcome Whitstable to Steel Cross for what is a must win encounter for both sides.