

Crowborough RFC 1st XV 15 v's Hove RFC 1st XV 15

In front of a large partisan crowd at Steel Cross, Crowborough unveiled their new strip, supplied by 1st Team sponsors Jackson Rowe, for this crucial London League Division 4 SE match against 2nd placed Hove.

Crowborough were without captain Gilbert, but welcomed returnee Williams into the back row. For the third week in succession Crowborough led this match late into the second half only to see their lead whittled away, and victory narrowly denied them.

Hove are a much changed side, with a well drilled back line, and it was clear from the outset that they were in no mood to mix it up front with the small but tenacious Crowborough pack, content on getting quick ball into the hands of the impressive backs out wide.

Several blistering runs by the Hove backs would have led to scores against lesser sides, but 'Boro's tightening of the defence in recent matches, and impressive tacking form of centre pairing Needs and Walters, brought the moves to a halt allowing Brooker to clear up field.

Williams's return turned out to be short lived, as he left the field after five minutes with a broken nose, to be replaced by hooker Thompson out on the flank.

Following a strong passage of play from both Forwards and backs, the ball was put into touch on the Hove 10 metre line. Crowborough stole the lineout and tapped down to Botterman and as the ball was driven downfield, Hove prevented the release, and Atkin took a quick tap penalty and chipped into the corner for a Hove lineout. Again 'Boro stole the lineout and with Hayes holding on firm, the pack drove him over the line to open the scoring, although Palmers difficult conversion attempt bounced off the wrong side of the upright. 5-0

As half time approached, the Hove fly half made a decisive break down the middle of the field covering fully fifty unchallenged metres, before being brilliantly brought down just short of the line by Mitch Mulherbe, although he was harshly judged to have prevented the release of the ball, and shown the first yellow card that Crowborough have conceded in over 200 minutes of play. The penalty was converted to make the half time score 5-3.

Still with 14 men 'Boro took the ball to Hove with some excellent running and support play from the mobile pack, and when Hove handled in the loose Palmer slotted the 30 metre penalty.8-3.

With just a minute of the sin bin remaining, the Hove fly half sent a wicked pass wide out to the right, missing both centres, to the blind side winger coming in on the burst, who, as he bent to pick the ball off his toes, avoided the first covering tackle, allowing his momentum to carry him on to score deep in the corner. The conversion attempt was missed, and the score level at 8-8, as Mulherbe returned to the fray.

With a full compliment back on the park, Crowborough again attacked, first taking on the Hove pack, and then releasing the backs, with Walters and Atkin having half chances to score, but denied by good Hove cover defence. With 20 minutes to go another Boro attack deep into the Hove 22, broke down as the ball was seemingly passed to every player in the attacking line , making it easy for the defence to drift across and from the ensuing ruck skew the ball into touch on the 22. From the line out Boro controlled the ball, sucking in the loose defenders, and as the ball was released Brooker fed Needs who drew his man to feed Walters on the burst. Such was the speed of take that the opposing centre barely laid a hand on him as he crashed over for a try close to the posts that palmer converted.15-8

Crowborough were now into the last quarter of the match and leading. This is a situation that they have not managed well in recent matches. Ominously Hove immediately came back through their backs, but Crowborough threw everything at them, tackling to a man, but unable to obtain possession and break out of their 22. For fully eight minutes this impasse continued, and with three minutes to go a speculative chip forward by the impressive Hove fly half, bounced between the covering Greenwood and Jackson and at any other time would have rolled over the dead ball line , but instead took a wicked bounce left, straight into the grateful hands of the fly half following up his own kick, to put down between the sticks. The simple conversion took the score to 15-15 at full time.

It is a measure of how this Crowborough side's play and confidence has improved in recent matches, that they were all disappointed not to have taken both points off this powerful Hove side, who still remain in second place in the league. Crowborough climbed to fourth place and travel to 6th placed Folkestone this Saturday, for the first of their five match run-in to the Christmas break.