

Crowborough RFC 1st XV 5 v's Whitstable RFC 1st XV 11

Disappointment, frustration, and utter disbelief. These were just some of the emotions expressed by the players, coaches and supporters following a lamentable performance at Steel Cross last Saturday, against a Whitstable side determined to reverse the one point loss against Crowborough in early October.

For the second week running, Crowborough had to endure several forced changes, but this cannot be used as an excuse as the replacements were all talented and had all been starters during the season. Maybe it was the shortage of training together; a lack of match practice, or simply taking the opposition for granted. Whatever the reason, Crowborough started the match in their usual manner, recycling quick forward ball and putting their the backs away. Within five minutes 'Boro had the opportunity to score twice, but poor final passing, and equally poor catching saw the moves break down at the last moment. However it looked as it was only a matter of time.

After fifteen minutes and with play kept deep in the Whitstable half, Crowborough, having done all the hard work, still could not make the territorial advantage pay with points on the board. Having got into the red zone it appeared that 'boro were bereft of ideas to exploit their advantage, or what tactics employ to take full advantage of all the preceding hard work.

After 20 minutes Palmer left the field with a tweaked ham string, and with Whitstable having absorbed the initial 'Boro pressure, started to spoil the quick ball that 'Boro had enjoyed, and with "sleight of hand" and using their well drilled forwards, moved the ball down the field. With 'Boro on the back foot, the ball was fed to the #10, who chipped the wing and bounced the ball short of Brooker at full back. The ensuing ruck saw a 'Boro hand interfere with the ball and the penalty in front of the posts was awarded, and then amazingly missed!

With 30 minutes gone 'Boro again put pressure on the Whitstable line, securing quick ball for the backs and setting up wave after wave of attacks. However by crabbing across the field and with no-one straightening the line or putting in the decisive oblique run, the Whitstable drift defence was up to the task. As the move was again halted a maul was set up and as Martyn emerged he released the ball to Bissett who fed Atkin. Atkin moved left across the field and just as it looked as though 'Boro were running out of space, he dummied, held the ball up for a fraction before popping the ball to Warren Mulherbe coming in on the burst, to crash through the cover defence to score out wide. The conversion was missed.5-0

With almost 10 minutes of “injury “ time played and with the Whitstable pack keeping Crowborough penned on their own line it looked ominously as though Whitstable would pull points back before half time.

Although the whistle went to end the half it was only to be 30 seconds into the second half before Whitstable got onto the score board.

From the kick off deep into the ‘Boro 22, several players called for the catch, only for it to elude all of them and bounce awkwardly causing a knock on five metres out from the ‘boro line. From the scrum the #8 picked up and broke infield, only to be superbly stopped by Bissett. Two more attempts to the left drew in the ‘Boro defence, and then the decisive break to the coverless right saw Whitstable back on terms, as the try went unconverted.5-5

Until this point Crowborough had not taken full advantage of all the ball supplied to the backs, but it would only be a matter of time, with so much possession before the defence would buckle. It was therefore a touch mystifying as to why ‘Boro would decide to change tactics and mix it with the strong Whitstable pack, who had demonstrated, in 120 minutes of rugby, that they would stand toe to toe for the whole match.

This was probably the turning point of the encounter, as Whitstable rode the patience of the referee, who in spite of warning Whitstable on several occasions, did not resort to a card of any colour that would have tempered some of the illegal and over robust antics. Failure to exert control resulted in one or two ‘Boro players taking the law into their own hands, and after the Whitstable pack had driven the ball into the ‘Boro 22, hands in the ruck gifted the opposition three points 5-8

For the rest of the half ‘Boro persevered with their forward game, and following another penalty Whitstable went further ahead 5-11.

It was far to late, but at last realising that they were in real danger of losing this “ must win match” match, ‘Boro returned to their well tried and tested running rugby for a last ditch attempt to edge the game in the last 30 seconds and moved the ball the length of the field before the move was ended fifteen metres out and cleared to touch, to bring the match to an end 5-11.

With several matches throwing up peculiar results, Crowborough remain by one point in third place, but such is the closeness of this division, it

leaves them only three points from ninth place, which puts into context the importance of next weeks away fixture to fourth place Charlton Park.