

Hastings and Bexhill 1st XV 27 v's Crowborough 1st XV 7

With five changes to the normal starting XV; the pack conceding a stone a man; playing a side fighting for league survival, and with sustained westerly winds in excess of 45mph, this was always going to be a tough end of season match for Crowborough.

The tactics of both sides became clear within minutes of the kick off, with Hastings electing to play with the wind, hoofing the ball deep into the Crowborough 22, before bringing in their gargantuan pack to bulldoze the final metres.

Boro on the other hand, accepted they would have to live off scraps of possession, and to depend upon quick ball to their backs. Indeed 'boro showed the initial initiative with several wide out attacks, but they could not adjust their line up to compensate for the strength of the wind, and consequently passes went to ground or behind the supporting players only to be hacked on by the defending Hastings side.

Hastings were first on the score board, through a penalty for handling in the ruck, and with the wind the 25 metre kick was a formality. 3-0

Within minutes they went further ahead when a clearance kick from inside the Hastings 22, bounced off the Crowborough corner flag into touch 70 metres upfield! Hastings stole the five metre lineout, and although the initial surge was well halted by the smaller Crowborough pack, it was only a brief respite as the Hastings juggernaut ploughed over the line for five more points. The kick was missed. 8-0

Crowborough still believed in themselves, and played as only they know how in these conditions and against larger opposition, running every bit of the limited possession, but too often isolating themselves and allowing Hastings to turn the ball over. With 'Boro pressing, and determined to get back on level terms, it was Hastings who went further ahead. When 'boro failed to clear their line, a five metre scrum was won by Hastings and although Bissett was clearly impeded, the scrum half neatly used the blind side to feed the winger who went over to score in the corner, which the fly half converted. 15-0

Crowborough were lucky not to concede yet another score on the stroke of half time, but this time the pack superbly held the surge back as the whistle went.

With the wind on their backs Crowborough's second half strategy was obvious. Belt it down the park and play in the oppositions 22. Unfortunately the challenge of running the length of the field seemed rather more appealing.

On several occasions 'Boro created problems for themselves, when eschewing the chance to clear up field, they attempted to break out from their own 22, only to fumble the ball and hand the initiative over to the grateful Hastings attack. These desperate tactics, became a self fulfilling prophecy, as the more anxious players became at their lack of progress, the more individual and isolated they became.

With 'boro once more attempting to break out with the running game, a slipped pass was intercepted by the Hastings centre who galloped over the line to score another gifted try which was unconverted. 20-7

Stung by the potential humiliation, 'Boro started to raise their game, at last using the boot to gain territory, and from a lineout deep in the Hastings 22, the ball dropped to Jackson who used his soccer skills to chip forward and win the foot race for the touch down, leaving Palmer with a difficult conversion attempt wide out on the left. The kick was hit fat, and wobbled towards the posts before gently landing on the crossbar, and then slowly toppling over to bring the score to 20-7.

Energised, 'boro had several promising attacks inside the Hastings half, although poor handing and passing did not do these attacks justice. It was all too little too late, and while everyone appeared to have settled for a 20-7 final score, and were just waiting for the whistle to signal the end of the match, Crowborough threw everyone into one final attack, but as the move broke down, and with no deep cover, the Hastings substitute winger latched onto a wide pass and outstripped the tired 'boro defence to score out wide on the left which was superbly converted to bring the final score to a flattering 27-7.

The final Crowborough match is at home to Horsham in two weeks time, which is now a must win match.

