

MATCH REPORT – SATURDAY 21st JANUARY 2012-01

TORQUAY ATHLETIC 48 V KINGSBRIDGE 10

Torquay came from behind to run out comfortable winners on a pitch dried out by a strong north westerly wind. Kicking towards the seaward end Kingsbridge had first use of that wind.

The visitors lay just above the bottom three relegation zone at the start of the day but their league position is slightly misleading. Following a well documented poor start to the season with only one win by mid November, whilst suffering a player shortage they went into this game unbeaten in their last six outings, which included a home draw, 22 – 22 against top side St. Austell.

Tics had to reshuffle just before the start when centre James Hill pulled a hamstring in the warm up. Tony McCarthy stepped up from the bench to slot in.

As expected the visitors competed from the off. Scoring up to the half hour was limited to penalties, mainly given away by each team for offside. James Wood converted both of his chances from in front, whilst no. 9 Matt Barlow could only manage one out of two from similar positions.

Then on 30 minutes with the score at 6 – 3 Barlow made a break from halfway in a very crowded midfield. The ex-Tics scrum half has added a sharp edge to his game since returning to his home town side two seasons ago and he made ground to the 22' before being hauled down from where Captain and hooker Matt Darke took it on to score under the posts. Barlow's conversion gave Kings's a 10 – 6 advantage.

This was held for five minutes until Tics won turnover ball at a ruck on the visitors ten metre line from where no. 10 Matt Jackson went off on a jinking run to score under the posts. Skipper Wood's conversion meant that Tics held the half time advantage 13 – 10 with the benefit of the wind at their backs to come.

On 45 minutes at a close in attacking scrum no. 8 Jon Arnold picked up and drove with the supporting Paul Wood providing the touchdown and his brother James converting to extend the lead to 20 – 10. On 55 minutes the hitherto productive tighthead Jon Woodhead was replaced by Gareth Binmore but the change did not disrupt Torquay's forward dominance in both the tight and the loose.

On 67 minutes Jackson made another break from the visitor's ten metre line and he weaved his way through to the line for Wood to convert 27 – 10. With a bonus point try now beckoning Tics kicked for position on a home penalty award and from a line out fifteen metres from the Kingsbridge line the pack rumbled a maul to within 2 metres. In a slightly bizarre spectacle virtually the whole of the backs division then joined the shove to get over the line and when the bodies had separated no. 9 Alex Jeffery emerged as the scorer (a reprise to his effort at Ivybridge a week earlier). The relief at gaining the four try point was palpable for the players, coaches and supporters and Tics were now out of sight at 34 – 10.

For the next few minutes the home side lost some focus and play became scrappy until full back Wood grasped the nettle and went on a mazy run down the Grandstand side of the pitch. As he was losing his balance by the touchline he released a back hand blind pass which was snaffled by replacement back rower Alex Smith who darted in from fifteen metres out. Smith was returning after five weeks absence through injury and had joined the fray from the bench in the final quarter.

By now Kingsbridge were visibly tiring and were then reduced to fourteen men for the final few minutes after losing a player to injury during which period centre Tony McCarthy added a final try converted by Matt Jackson. Score 48 – 10.

Whereas the previous week's win at Ivybridge had been down to a classic forwards/backers combination with all five tries going to the threequarters the Tics dominance in this match was founded on forward power. None played better than open side stalwart Paul Wood with a prodigious tackle count, a number of surging runs and his usual spoiling on the ground.

Jon Arnold also seemed to relish starting at no. 8 for the second week running in what was his 150th First Team appearance and he kept up the pressure on the visitors with a number of pick and goes. Also impressive in the blustery conditions was Tics 100% kicking success with Wood landing two penalties and four conversions, backed up at the end by Matt Jackson's two conversions.

This win enabled Torquay to leap frog over next week's opponents Okehampton into third place by virtue of a superior points difference. Okehampton three losses this season have come against all the three sides above them in the table (St. Austell, North Petheron and Torquay, who won at home on 8th October 2011 by 29 – 19). This will be a stern test as Okehampton are unbeaten in their last seven games and have yet to lose at home.

A 52 seater coach will travel to Okies next week leaving the Rec. at 11.30 am **at the latest** and supporters will be welcome on a first come first served basis. Support will be important over the next two vital games against fourth placed Okehampton and then home to leaders St. Austell on 4th February. Yesterday Okehampton won at Tiverton 10 – 13 and St. Austell had a walkover at St. Ives who were unable to raise a full team.

Torquay Athletic team:

15 – James Wood, 14 – Adam Chadwick, 13 – Matt Lloyd, 12 – Tony McCarthy,
11 – Ollie Pitts, 10 – Matt Jackson, 9 – Alex Jeffery,
1 – Nick Gill, 2 – Ben Sharples, 3 – Jon Woodhead, 4 – Nigle Yeo, 5 – Tom Whitford, 6 – Jon Oliver, 7 – Paul Wood, 8 – Jon Arnold.

Replacements: Gareth Binmore, Alex Smith, Harry Knapman

Other Results:

Merit Table 2 – Kingsbridge II's 47 – Quins 7

Colts Merit Table – Torquay Athletic Colts 15 V Okehampton Colts 29