

MATCH REPORT – 7TH JANUARY 2012
TORQUAY ATHLETIC 34 V EXETER SARACENS 12

The Tics secured a comfortable enough win against Exeter Saracens to record their first “double” of the season but a failure to register a four try bonus point means that they remain fourth in the Table rather than moving up a place. Top side North Petherton moved down to second on 54 points when they lost at Bideford 8 – 5 and their place at the top was taken by St. Austell on 55 points who won at home to Okehampton 15 – 7. Okehampton remain third on 50 points, one ahead of the Tics and Bideford are fifth, also on 49 points, but like Torquay have a game in hand on those above them

In the 1st minute the home side were awarded a penalty but James Wood’s effort from 40 metres went wide. However with only another three minutes of play gone Sarries tried to run the ball from their own 22’ and when isolated and tackled in midfield were penalised for holding on presenting an easy chance for Wood to get the scoreboard moving from in front of the posts.

On 8 minutes the same player picked a line and ran the ball back from his own 22’ drawing the opposition’s full back before shipping on to fellow centre Matt Lloyd who ran in behind the posts. With Wood converting Tics were now 10 – 0 to the good.

The visitors first chance to reply came on 16 minutes when a rare foray into Tics 22’ was rewarded with a penalty in front of the posts for offside. However no. 10 Dan Chalmers. 10 minutes later James Wood made no mistake from a similar position when Sarries infringed 32 metres from in front of their own posts. 13 – 0.

Exeter were visibly prone to basic errors when under any sort of pressure and after half an hour their threes’ knocked on in midfield from where James Wood hacked on ahead and although the bouncing ball eluded him chasing right wing James Hill was on hand to dot down and Tics moved 18 – 0 up.

However Sarries then enjoyed their best spell of the half culminating with a close in tap penalty switched to no. 13 Sam Gooch who crossed wide out left with Chalmers this time succeeding with a touchline conversion for 18 – 7. On 40 minutes Tics were awarded a penalty, also out wide left but after enquiries revealed that visiting Referee Rupert Dyke was about to blow for half time Wood elected to kick and his penalty sent Tics 21 – 7 ahead at the break.

Torquay took time to settle in the second period and were becoming increasingly frustrated by the visitors spoiling tactics leading to hooker Simon Mabin finding his way to the sin bin after 50 minutes for retaliation at a ruck. However Tics were next to register on the board after a passage of play resulting in slow ball from a ruck which fly half Matt Jackson struck sweetly from the opposition 10 metre line for a drop goal and 3 more points: 24 – 7. At the same time home tight head Gareth Binmore retired with an injury to be replaced by Jon Woodhead.

A minute later Tics surrendered a soft try when questioning the award of a penalty out wide left on their own 22.' Another quick tap penalty was moved to prop Steve Easterbrooke who trundled in virtually unopposed for an unconverted score – 24 – 12.

On 70 minutes young Marcus Phillips making his 1st team League debut at no. 6 was now replaced by Jon Oliver and with Simon Mabin restored Tics were back to full strength and looking to secure two further tries in the remaining quarter of the game to guarantee a winning bonus point.

Wood was presented with another routine penalty from in front of the posts to stretch the lead to 27 – 12. Then from pressure by the pack Jon Arnold was adjudged held up over the line and from the resulting 5 metre scrum the forwards produced a well timed monumental shove to leave Paul Wood, now playing at no.8, a straight forward touch down, which his brother converted for 34 – 12 with 10 minutes time left to play.

However although the backs, led by Jackson, continued to kick intelligently to establish field position Tics were not able to fashion another try. At the end the game was becoming increasingly fractious and fractured with the Referee halting proceedings at least twice to lecture the two Captains. Indeed he finally lost patience and halted proceedings just over a minute early, albeit that Tics were defending in their own 22' at the time.

A look at the League table shows that Tics total of only 5 bonus points is building up a potential problem for the final shake down if the team can keep up its winning momentum. There is just one automatic promotion place to the top side with a play-off against the runners up in Western Counties North awaiting those in second place. Despite having played a game less than the three sides above them and having lost only 2 matches compared to the top two, St. Austell and North Petherton who have lost three and each (like Tics) drawn two, Tics tally of 5 bonus points compares to St. Austell on 11 and 'Petherton on 10.

This is especially surprising as, although having played a game less Tics game points for tally at 426 is only 3 points behind the best in the League – North Petherton with a tally of 429. The conclusion is that Torquay's points for tally has been boosted better than most other teams by the quality of skipper James Wood's kicking strike rate.

However if there are aspirations to promotion the playing side is aware that it has to address problems with overall game management in order to fashion more bonus points. This is not to say that all is doom and gloom; indeed if a bonus point had been gained yesterday and another was garnered from a win in the game in hand (away to Bideford) this would have placed Tics at the head of the table virtue of a superior points difference. It really has become that close.

However this is all conjecture. Currently it is very tight at the top of the table with any two from five realistically in with a chance of promotion. Consequently it is all to play for, although as each week passes by the margin for error or misjudgements becomes tighter for all the top five teams involved.

Looking at the fixtures to come the good thing is that at present Tics have their fate in their own hands with St. Austell, Bideford and North Petherton still to visit the Rec.

Team:

15 – Tony McCarthy, 14 Adam Chadwick, 13 – James Wood, 12 – Matt Lloyd, 11 – James Hill, 10 – Matt Jackson, 9 – Alex Jeffery,
1 – Nick Gill, 2 – Simon Mabin, 3 – Gareth Binmore, 4 – David Carpenter, 5 – Jon Arnold, 6 – Richard Read, 7 – Paul Wood, 8 – Marcus Phillips.

Replacements: (all used) – Jon Woodhead, Jon Oliver, Richard Wood.

Meanwhile the Extra Firsts gained a valuable Merit Table win over Paignton II's at Clennon Valley by 6 – 27. Five tries came from Tom Brookman (2), Carl Turner, James Milton and Dan Taylor with Jack Keiller adding a conversion.

At TVN the Colts fought out an entertaining draw V Topsham in a Merit Table match 17 – 17.

The Quins Merit Table game at Exeter Saracens was called off on Thursday due to a Exeter City Council declaring the pitch not fit for play.

Written 08 01 12