

MATCH REPORT – SATURDAY 28th JANUARY 2012

OKEHAMPTON 23 V TORQUAY ATHLETIC 15

Torquay lost ground at the top of Western Counties West following this defeat as four out of the five sides around them at the top recorded wins.

From the first whistle Okehampton were fired up, their commitment stoked by skipper and prop Ian Langdridge (ex Launceston) who led by example. Following heavy showers over the Moors during the week the undulating pitch was the softest that Tics had encountered during the campaign.

Okehampton have not lost at home this season and Tics can have no grumbles over the result. The home side base their approach on strong scrummaging and dominated this area of play, most notably when playing with the slope in the first half. Over the past two games Torquay have put in strong performances and found their try scoring knack courtesy of a go forward pack, quick service from the base and fluid back play. However the opportunity to run the ball here was negated by a pudding of a pitch and the need to defend for long periods.

There were three enforced changes from the previous 48 – 10 win over Kingsbridge. Jon Arnold went down with a virus, prop Gareth Binmore developed a chest infection and Paul Wood was unavailable. Once again the pack was without the services of Simon Mabin, still recovering from a hospital stay.

After 4 minutes the Okes elected to scrum a five metre penalty when Tics ventured offside and after shoving the visitors back No. 8 Steve Alford dotted down for the first score. No. 10 Kev Dennis missed the conversion: 5 – 0. Torquay were then granted a penalty of their own but ball striking in the mud was already difficult as the pitch cut up and James Wood's effort went wide.

On 13 minutes Tics no. 8, Dan Williams was pinged for holding on in front of the posts and from the 22' Dennis increased the lead to 8 – 0. Then half way through the first period Tics conceded again. Okes full back Matt Dennis caught a kick ahead on his own 10 metre line and returned the high ball. When it dropped on Tics own 10 metre line no defenders took charge and the ball was allowed to bounce high and kind for the chasing Dennis who eluded poor tackling to run in under the posts with his brother converting for 15 – 0. A soft try.

Tics now kept the ball and set up a rolling maul which appeared to be brought down not once but twice in quick succession by the home side. However Referee Sara Cox decided that open side flanker Alex Smith had been too robust with his feet and awarded a penalty to Okes and reduced Tics numbers by yellow carding the bemused Smith.

It was 25minutes before Tics paid their first visit to Okes' 22', only to lose possession to a free kick. However on their next visit on the half hour Okes went offside and Wood scored with a routine kick from in front, 15 – 3. Although Okehampton came

back strongly in the final 10 minutes of the half Torquay, now with Alex Smith restored, defended resolutely with Dan Williams working overtime taking the ball on from the base of a scrum under pressure. Tics had won the toss and elected to use the slope in the second half. In theory a 12 point deficit was not insurmountable but on the restart when the kick off did not travel 10' Tics immediately found themselves defending at the wrong end of the pitch and soon after conceded another penalty in front for offside from which Dennis extended the lead to 18 – 3.

Four minutes later the visitors again conceded a penalty kick but replacement back Carl Poynton could not oblige from further out. Lock Tom Whitford then made a break and was able to find James Wood up in support but he was stopped just short of the line. Whitford then made way for Jake Knight.

For the first time in the match Tics were now building up sustained pressure and on 52 minutes prop Russ Morris, brought on at half time after several weeks out with injury, burst through from short range after a quick tap penalty. Wood converted for 18 – 10. Shortly after this Nick Gill departed with a knee problem.

With a quarter of the game to go the next score would be crucial. Okehampton gained field position and Tics were penalised for pulling a defending set scrum around. Again Langdridge elected to pack down and his side found another concerted shove for Alford to touch down. Poynton missed the conversion but it was 23 – 10 and Tics now needed two converted tries to overhaul their opponents.

They pressed and on two occasions were adjudged held up over the line. In between these episodes a 5 metre line out in the bottom corner was mauled en masse by the black and whites with Alex Jeffery getting the touchdown wide out for 23 – 15 but when the conversion attempt went wide Tics were still a point short of a losing bonus point.

In the final minute they returned to the attack and for the third time were adjudged held up over the line – this time under the posts, but there was not any time left on the Referee's watches and she blew before the five metre scrum could engage. Final score 23 – 15.

This reverse means Torquay drop from third to fifth in the table with a game in hand on all but Bideford who they visit on 11th February. Although this was the team's first loss since 12th November at Devonport realistically Tics now have to return to winning ways immediately and next week entertain St. Austell who were worthy winners at home by 24 – 12 on 15th October. St Austell are bringing big support with several members intending to make it a stopover. With the Calcutta Cup Six Nations game kicking off at 5.00 pm the Rec. Clubhouse should be buzzing.

With nine games to go Coach Chris Dorling says the spirit of the players is not diminished and is confident of achieving a good run of results to put Tics back in the final shake down. All involved on the playing side appeal for good vocal support next Saturday.

Torquay 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 – Nigel Yeo, 5 – Tom Whitford, 6 – Jon Oliver, 7 – Alex Smith, 8 – Dan Williams,

Replacements; Russ Morris (41 minutes), Jake Knight (60 minutes), Carl Turner.

Meanwhile the Extra Firsts achieved an outstanding home win at the Rec by 60 – 22 against Okehampton's second string in a Merit Table League match. After being behind 19 –3 the visitors almost made up the deficit before Tics moved up a gear in the second period spreading the ball wide for the backs to score freely against a tiring Okehampton defence.

At TVN the Quins lost to Tavistock II's 17 - 46 in a Merit Table 2 match but despite the scoreline pushed the visitors hard.

The Colts had no scheduled match.

Finally, next week's home game is sponsored by the Old Albanians, a clutch of Members who have been asked to donate £10 per head for a buffet lunch. This is an open invitation to any Members or others to boost Club fund and if you wish to attend at 1.00 pm please telephone Co-ordinator Brian Chamings asap on 01803 406524 to confirm your attendance. Alternatively the £10 donation can be left behind the Bar in an envelope marked Old Albanians with your name on the front or you can e'mail Brian on brian.chamings@sky.com.