

MATCH REPORT – ST. IVES 8 v TORQUAY ATHLETIC 22-
SATURDAY 18TH FEBRUARY 2012

As is often the case at this time of year Torquay made their longest away trip of the season to St. Ives to be greeted by a combination of rain, high wind and a heavy pitch.

Following a scare about having to pull out of the League prematurely following their 104 – 3 drubbing at Okehampton and a “no show” at home to St. Austell the Hakes have enjoyed a change in fortune on the field with a satisfying 34 – 22 win last time out at the end of January against Devonport Services. The Club has also used a couple of weeks of inactivity due to weather postponements to sort out immediate player availability.

The visitors however were forced to make six changes from the side which had performed so ably as a unit at Bideford a week earlier due to injuries and unavailability, although the game saw the return of pack regular Jon Arnold. There was a start for new young recruit Dan Cheers, a fly half who bedded in at full back before reverting to his natural position in the second half.

Although the rain relented in that second half the conditions inevitably produced an error strewn match. Torquay had first use of the wind and the slope but after half an hour had failed to make any serious impression on the match.

Indeed the home side dominated possession with Player/ Coach Joff Rowe enjoying time and space at No. 8 to pick up at virtually every set scrum and weigh up the best options. St. Ives also mainly dominated at line out time. Their game is largely based on catching and driving at lineouts and this drill worked well for them throughout. However ironically they took the lead on 30 minutes through the backs when the ball was spun blind for right wing Tom Chandler to run in from the 22.’ 5 – 0.

Tics needed to respond before half time before facing the strong wind and replied first when fly half Matt Jackson struck a penalty from in front for 5 – 3. A few minutes later No 8 Alex Smith charged down a clearing kick to score and at the change round it was 5 – 8.

Torquay followers were anticipating a difficult 40 minutes against the wind and the slope against a St. Ives pack which had controlled their own set piece thus far. Tactically Coach Chris Dorling made three changes: First open side Ben Sharples moved up to hooker with his place at No. 7 taken by Marcus Phillips and a debut was given to prop Olywaseun Olayanju at loose head.

For St. Ives although veteran Joff Rowe withdrew but his replacement Scott Perkin continued to do damage at the base of scrums and rucks with his bulldozing drives close to the ground setting up second phase. However although St. Ives backs were now seeing more of the ball than their opposite numbers they failed to penetrate and to their credit Tics defended well.

Russ Morris then lifted the pressure with a strong run from close in, his power and momentum enabling him to stretch and get the ball over the line. A difficult conversion by Matt Jackson against the wind extended Tics lead to 5 – 15.

Apart from some darts from midfield trying to break the gain line Torquay's back line had done little to test the St. Ives defence, one which has leaked more points than any other in Western Counties West. However right wing Adam Chadwick then used opportunities to run the ball back from half way when fielding kicks ahead on two occasions before chipping the full back. On the first of these attacks he appeared to be tripped whilst chasing his own kick but Referee Richard Prior waved play on and the chances came to nothing.

Chadwick then popped up on the opposite wing when Torquay switched the ball wide through the hands quickly for the first time. He is now thirty five and may have lost the extra yard of space but none of his guile, balance and ability to stand up defenders. Here, on half way, he executed a dummy to take out two defenders and then jinked inside the covering full back so that he was able to touch down under the posts for Jackson to convert and set Tics clear 5 – 22.

A bonus point would have been the icing on the cake but Tics still had some defending to do. A penalty on 65 minutes for offside was put away by Jacob Nannes and gave the home side a glimmer of hope but Tics continued to defend resolutely although they could not mount sufficient pressure of their own to add to the score so it was 8 – 22 at the final whistle.

On the positive side replacements Olywaseun Olayanju (also able to play at hooker) and Marcus Phillips performed competently and in his second full game back after a long injury lay off Russ Morris seemed to have regained his appetite and confidence for ball carrying. At No. 8 Dan Williams enjoyed an outstanding afternoon picking up at the base behind an often retreating scrum and as has become commonplace scrum half Alex Jeffery showed his normal composure.

This win puts Tics in good heart for a run of three home matches, the first of which is a rearranged game at the Rec. next week V St. Austell who surprisingly came away with no league points at home where they went down 0 – 9 to neighbours Truro. Tics remain fourth on 67 points, one point behind Okehampton but with a game (versus St. Austell) in hand. North Petherton are the new leaders on 72 points having defeated Ivybridge away. Their points difference is the best in the League. St Austell drop to second on 69.

The remaining fixtures include Okehampton entertaining North Petherton and St. Austell have to travel to Petherton.

Finishing in the top two is now very much in Tics own hands. They remain unbeaten at home and five of their remaining League fixtures will be played there including visits from St. Austell, Bideford and Petherton (on the final League weekend). With home matches against Tiverton and Devonport Services in March, both of whom have spoiling packs when on song, Torquay need to address how they can return to playing a wider game, which has helped to yield the best points for tally in the League to date. There is also a need for more nous at lineout time.

Team:

15 – Dan Cheers, 14 – Adam Chadwick, 13 – Matt Lloyd, 12 – Tony McCarthy, 11 – Jack Keiller, 10 – Matt Jackson, 9 – Alex Jeffery,
1 – Russ Morris, 2 – Carl Turner, 3 – Jon Woodhead, 4 – Tom Whitford, 5 – Jon Arnold, 6 – Ben Sharples, 7 – Alex Smith, 8 – Dan Williams,

Replacements: Marcus Phillips, O. Olayanju, Jake Knight (all played).

Meanwhile at the Rec. the Extra Firsts retained third spot in Merit Table 1 with a win over Crediton II's by 26 – 8 which involved four tries and three conversions.

The Quins resumed Merit Table duty with a comfortable away win over Totnes II's by 5 – 29..

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE HOME GAME v ST AUSTELL ON 25/02 WILL KICK OFF AT 3.00 PM AND NOT 2.30 PM AND SUPPORTERS WANTING PARKING ON THE GROUND ARE ADVISED TO ARRIVE EARLY ESPECIALLY AS (WEATHER PERMITTING) THE MAIN GAME WILL BE PRECEDED BY A MATCH BETWEEN TORBAY SHARKS AND MALVERN TO BE PLAYED FOR THE PEGGY MCCARTHY MEMORIAL CUP WITH A 12 NOON KICK OFF.