

Old Amplefordians (H) vs Old Caterhamians (28/09/19)

Thankfully it had rained a considerable amount between the first two OA matches of the season, which made the pitch slightly more forgiving than the previous Saturday. Despite the week's rain, the weather held out all afternoon for the supporters that made it down to watch a brilliant game of rugby ending with the OAs getting their first win of the season, 32-28, against a good Old Caterhamians side.

The first 15 minutes of the game were incredibly evenly matched with both teams attacking and defending well; there really was very little between the two sides during open play. However, from the offset of the game, the OAs showed clear dominance at the scrum. Ben Cogley and Micheal Hardy may have done themselves a disservice with the phenomenal performance they put in in the front row, winning countless penalties and scrums against the head.

With the game so close it was no surprise that the first points scored for each side were penalty kicks. As both sides eased into the game it was great to see the OA's strong ball-carrying forwards get on the front foot, and then the backs really work to get outside the Old Cats, working the ball out to the touchlines. It was in this manner that Jeremy Massey-Birch managed to get outside his opposite number and scramble over the line for the first try of the day, 10-3.

The Old Cats were straight back, with a penalty for not releasing giving them a simple 3 points; an infringement we committed too frequently on the weekend. With 10 minutes to go in the half, the opposition 8 was shown a yellow card for behaviour off the ball and the OAs capitalised on the opportunity. Will Sheperd hit a phenomenal crash ball from 10m out to score, and Jamie Reid, who was unstoppable all day, scored on the back of another dominant OAs scrum, 22-6.

Just before the half time whistle the Old Cats scrum half showed some brilliant feet to snipe around a ruck and run in a solid try ending the first half at 22-13.

With only one substitute there weren't many fresh legs coming on in the second half for the OAs. Whilst the fitness of the team was markedly improved from last week there is still a way to go on this front. The second half performance was in general a gear behind what we had seen in the first half, too often turning to easy one out runners in attack and falling off tackles in defence. This is something that the OAs still need to rectify if we are to reach our ambition of a top 3 finish.

The first score of the second half came after about 10 minutes, from a very classy turnover by Old Cats. Noticing nobody was home, they kicked deep and their fast winger chased incredibly well to catch a brilliant bounce and score. This long range try was matched by an equally impressive long range penalty kick about 5 minutes later bringing the Old Cats back to within 1 point, 22-21.

The final 20 minutes of the game were truly attritional. The OAs line out maul was firing on all cylinders and gave us a lot of momentum. With this, matched by some impressive carries in the

centre of the field, we once more found ourselves in the opposition 22. From here the OAs worked the pick and drive for phase on phase until Ben Cogley gave the final effort and got over the whitewash, 27-21.

5 minutes to go and the OAs needed to exit well from the kick off. Luckily the kick off was short, and with no front row replacement available, we were given the ball from an uncontested scrum. In a truly heart wrenching moment, the Old Cats intercepted a pass from the back of the scrum and ran in a try that was converted to give them the lead, 27-28, with just under 4 minutes to go.

As they fielded the kick off all seemed lost but a mid-field turnover by Mike Inglis could not have come at a better time. From here it all seems a blur, but we ended 3m out from the opposition line racking up the phases patiently waiting. Nobody, myself included, was getting in Man of the Match, Will Sheperd's, way as he screamed for the ball to score in the corner as the last play of the game. OAs win 32-28.

It was a great game to both spectate and play in. The OAs put in a true team performance and showed real grit and composure to grind out a 5 point win at the end of a tough match against a strong side.

Thank you very much to the Old Caterhamians for a great game, we'll look forward to the return fixture in January!

The day was made only better by the debut of OA, Charlie Prest, who played fantastically on the wing carrying and tackling well, it is great to have you along! With a long break of 2 weekends off, the OAs now look forward to a bit of time to recover and some social weekends watching the RWC down at the Forge before our next game on the 19th of October.

Mom: Michael Hardy

DoD: Jamie Reid

Team Sheet:

M. Hardy (C); G. O'Connell; B. Cogley; M. Inglis; D. Walker; C. Oxlade; J. Rollings; J. Reid; O. Chapman; T. Muir; W. Shepherd; R. Hunter-Blair; C. Prest; J. Massey-Birch; J. Grogan
Subs: B. Pearce