

2nd Mar 2019

Chipping Sodbury 1st XV – 43

Wells 1st XV – 15

Sodbury were without head coach Harvey Skelton, who has gone to Bali on a vegan and colonic irrigation retreat; Matt Dew, however, was front and centre to guide the men of Sodbury. This game saw the Sods return to winning ways after a few torrid weeks. It also marked Gavin Edgar's fourth hat-trick of the season.

The first try, on 3 minutes, went to Edgar. Lance Cassemis fielded a loose touch-finder on his own 22; he beat the first man, which gave enough time for the pack to arrive. The big men rioted through five phases, with Pete Butcher leading from the front and eating up the metres, as he did all game. The ball went left to Dan Cole, who was in irresistible form as he made his first line break of the game. Once the ball was with Edgar, he powered the last 15m to score in the corner.

With an early 7-point cushion, Sodbury kept their shape and went through the phases, probing and pushing Wells back. There was then a lengthy injury break as the referee was now probed by the Sodbury physio, before the restorative powers of the cold sponge got things going once more.

From the scrummage restart, Sodbury forced Wells back through three phases until the visitors punted long. Like any decent scrum-half, Tom Head was back on his 22 sweeping. He got a call from full-back Matt Tait and gave him the ball. Tait launched his own 50m kick down the tramlines and gave chase. It is well known that the path of a bouncing rugby ball is harder to pick than a broken nose, but Tait got lucky, chipped ahead, and spotted the cover – a card-carrying member of the front row union. Sorry front row-ers but it wasn't even a contest, and Tait dotted down the most wonderful solo try in the corner.

When Sodbury found themselves in their own half with defending to do, they set about the task with gusto. There was a series of rousing tackles from Otto Avent, Alan Keeping, and Dave Guest, which ultimately forced a turnover. Dan Bradley set off and took the ball to the Wells defensive line before feeding Cole, who burst clear. With Jon Cook in support offering scorching speed, he advanced further before finding Edgar, who bullied his way in from 30 metres for his second try. The softening-up continued as the Sodbury pack – led by Avent and Gareth Hollywell – continually made ground with ball in hand. Wells were forced to scramble manfully in defence to hold the hosts at bay.

When Sodbury stole a lineout on halfway the crowd held its breath. The Sods hammered through three phases before the ball got to Cook – with the ball in two hands, he twisted and turned the defence before breaking free to race in from 30 metres.

As the first half drew to a close, Wells pressed hard into Sodbury's 22. They broke free from a lineout but were stopped in their tracks by the menacing figure of Keeping. Birthday boy Lee Ralph was straight over the ball to win a turnover and ultimately a penalty. The Sods cleared to halfway and there was time for the lineout. The man nobody wants to lift, Pete Butcher, was thrust skyward to secure the ball – he delivered it off the top. Simple swift passing on the gainline created a small gap for pacey full-back Tait to exploit. He hit the line hard and scorched in from 20 metres for his brace. With the conversion, Sodbury had a 33 – 0 advantage and a well-earned halftime orange.

Wells kicked off the second half and were immediately under the cosh. The hosts pulled in the defence as they rattled through three rucks. Butcher, Avent, and Guest held nothing back, gaining vital ground as they smashed into the defence. The ball was moved left at speed: by the time it was at halfway, prop Hollywell had navigated his way into the line. He straightened the move up and unleashed a dummy, a prop's sidestep looked to be on but he released a pass of exquisite beauty. Now Tait, Cook, and Head took over. They raced down the wing, teasing the cover with slick inter-passing before giving the ball to Edgar, who burst free and got yet another fucking try.

Soon after, Wells exploited a lapse in concentration in the Sodbury ranks and scored their first try from a scrum within Sodbury's 22. The next half an hour saw plenty of endeavour but no score. The Sods were held up over the line on three occasions but also suffered being drawn back in to their own 22 as Wells rallied in patches.

Wells had a second try when they tapped a penalty to catch Sodbury napping. However, the hosts had their own back when Head tapped a penalty on Sodbury's 10m line. Bradley took the ball and drifted left before delivering an enchanting flat pass that Edgar hit at speed. He bounced one man away as he crossed into the Wells half; at 30m out, he veered right, evading two more men who rushed across in vain to stop him. Edgar's fourth try was a formality for Sodbury's arch finisher.

The final word went to Wells as they sneaked in for a try in the last minute but this final act of defiance couldn't dull the gloss of Sodbury's team performance.

