

8th Sep 2018

Chipping Sodbury 1st XV – 29

Old Bristolians 1st XV – 10

The Ridings was swarming with spectators for the first home game after promotion and they were treated to some wonderful running and creative rugby. Luke Balentine-Smith was welcomed back at tighthead and seemed to make a real difference at the scrum. The Sodbury eight gave their counterparts a torrid time as they easily shoved them around, eventually winning four feeds against the head. Sodbury also juggled personnel in their positions, switching broken-field expert Dan Bradley to full-back while Jack Skelton came into fly-half; both men excelled in their new roles.

Both teams looked keen to run the ball, but it was the hosts who had the better organisation. They were able to sweep through ten phases on a number of occasions but silly mistakes and, more worryingly, penalties, stymied Sodbury's progress. The Old Boys even missed a shot at goal on 14 minutes after sound play of their own had the alarm bells ringing around the Ridings.

With Sodbury's pack being led magnificently from the front by skipper Matt Cook, the softening-up work continued. Cook was followed by Otto Avent, Dave Turner, and Luke B-S in a coherent wave-after-wave attack. This created space for Skelton, Jon Cook, and safe-cracker Dan Cole, who had his lock picks out. No defence is impenetrable to the quick-stepping centre who could evade a tackle in a phone box.

There is also a hard edge to Sodbury hidden behind the flair, and they pride themselves on their stern defence. This was typified by flaxen-haired Jake Lewis, who patrolled his wing with menace. He made three perfectly timed tackles which looked like something from W.W.E. – the recipients were slow to get up and wary of going that way again.

With the half-time oranges on their minds, Sodbury were awarded a penalty 25 metres from Old Bristolians' posts, up stepped Jon Cook, who effortlessly stroked it over for a three point advantage as the whistle blew.

Immediately from the restart, Sodbury conceded a penalty which Old Bristolians kicked at goal for parity. Pete Butcher had entered the fray just before half-time, and now the hosts brought on Tom Head, who looked very fit after a summer of training with his mum.

Sodbury's first try came on 10 minutes, after a wayward clearance by the Old Boys. Bradley fielded it and set about cutting some dramatic lines as he ran it back. The pack joined in with a muscular effort and built the phases. As they crept past the visitors' 10 metre line, Skelton threw in a power-play of his own. He took the ball on three times, single-handed, with a vigour which carried him well over the gain-line each time, providing a target for the pack. The try was scored by Lewis on the blind as he took a leaf out of former 1st teamer, club sponsor, and indoor irrigation expert Mark Fisher's playbook – he simply hung about then dived over from 1 metre.

Head was the next to score when the Sods turned the ball over on halfway. There were strong carries from Butcher, Dom Pullen, and Jon Cook as the play was switched inside and out. The final intuitive inside pass was from Pullen, who found Head tracking the play like any decent scrum-half would. He ran it in from 30 metres out and Jon Cook converted.

Just 5 minutes later, Sodbury devastated an Old Boys scrum on halfway; the ball found Bradley, who once again broke the line. In support was delightful open-side Avent, who drew his man before finding Head once more. His second score – again converted by J.Cook - was met with huge cheers from the Sodbury faithful.

Old B's now enjoyed a bit of success themselves as the Sods were left to defend for a while. When Old B's won a Sodbury lineout on their hosts' 5 metre line the groan was audible. But once this surprise possession was swung wide, they dropped the ball.

Jon Cook was on hand to pick up: he did so without breaking stride and when he looked up he saw 85 metres of open space. He had the drop on a turning Bristolians player and set off at a huge velocity. However, he needed his wits about him as the cover came across, having to swerve them twice on his way to a spectacular solo try. Somehow he recovered from that lung-bursting run quickly enough to convert his own try.

With the bonus point secured, the game was played between the 22's, but when Sodbury relaxed sufficiently Old Boys pounced and swept in with a try of their own. The game was effectively over once skipper Cook picked up from a scrum in his 22 and kicked the ball long and true to relieve any last remnants of pressure and signal the jubilant scenes that a conclusive victory brings.