

1st Dec 2018

Gordano 1st XV – 27

Chipping Sodbury 1st XV – 24

Sodbury had the wind at their backs for the first half and started strongly. George Barnes led from the front, throwing himself into any contact with real enthusiasm as Sodbury probed the Gordano 22. When Gordano intercepted a pass and raced 60m with Sodbury in their wake, it was Dan Bradley who stopped their progress. This gave them a toe-hold in the visitors' 22 but, despite the outstanding defensive work of handsome Lee Ralph and the fresh-faced new addition to the club, Gareth Hollywell, a gap was breached at the edge of a maul and Sodbury found themselves seven points behind.

However, the visitors were straight back amongst the tries soon after. A central scrum provided the ball, which went left, where outsized wing Joe Horton seared into the Gordano defence with a ruinous force. He passed perfectly to Jon Cook, who poured through the gap and, as usual, out-paced everyone to score in the corner.

Gordano were back in the Sods' 22 sooner than the travelling support expected; they watched open-mouthed as the lineout was won and driven at Sodbury. Two quick solo breaks off the side was all it took for them to extend their lead.

Just five minutes later, Pete Butcher rose from the back of a scrum on Gordano's 10m line. He burst forward with a huge surge, brushing away the first tackler before passing two-handed to Bradley. The Sods sent play raging through six rucks with Hollywell and Niall Kincaid showing great determination and strength. The ball went right into the hands of Dan Cole, who once more bamboozled the hosts before passing to Gavin Edgar. Edgar looked set for another long-distance try but was pulled down short: as the

forwards poured in to secure the ball he was back on his feet just in time to scoop it up and dive in at the corner from 1 metre.

Sodbury spent the rest of the half soaking up pressure. Barnes and Jason Petchey were tackling like demons along with Dave Turner in an effort to repel Gordano. There was also strong over-the-ball work from Butcher, Hollywell and Tom Head – between them, they won crucial turnovers and forced penalties, keeping the sharks from scoring.

During the second half, Sodbury faced the elements. They struggled to get any speed into their rucking game and the pressure-relieving touch-finders were agonisingly short. Despite heroic defending from Bradley, Horton, and Barnes, Sodbury's thin black line was breached from a driving lineout from 8 metres. Just five minutes later, the hosts poured further woe on the Sods with a cheeky well-executed grubber behind the defence from the edge of the 22. This produced a converted try and Sodbury were now 24 – 10 down.

With the game now well inside the last quarter, rugby catalyst Butcher turned himself up to eleven. First he won a crucial turnover deep in the 22, then he snow-ploughed the Gordano tacklers away from the back of a scrum. The ball went left to Jack Skelton, who replaced Cole. Skelton's speed off the mark is remarkable but his awareness and willingness to play is of another world. He slipped the ball out of a tackle to Edgar; this was the 70m try the crowd had turned up for. With his parents at fever pitch in the stand, Edgar set off – the high knee lift and ramrod fend making him a fearsome opponent. He saw off four men on his way to the posts – and there were more who simply couldn't stop him – leaving an easy conversion for Cook.

After ten minutes of bone-crunching rugby, Gordano got a penalty on Sodbury's 22: they slotted it, taking away the losing bonus point. The Sods raced back at the hosts in an attempt to rescue something from the game. They too then got a penalty on the Gordano 22. Skipper for the day Jon Cook turned down the simple 3-pointer and kicked for the lineout. His trust in the ability of the pack to deliver was well-founded. The lineout was duly won and dragged down illegally. Now scrums were opted for and, as the penalties mounted, Sodbury kept scrummaging.

Eventually Sodbury managed to keep the hosts' front row square and sent them backwards in a teeth-grinding odyssey. The effervescent Tom Head, with blood streaming from his ear, scooped up the ball in his heavily muscled arms and powered over for a try which, once converted, brought Sodbury to within three points of victory. The two bonus points on the road elevated them to 5th in Western Counties North.

