

## Leigh East U11's vs Shevington Sharks U11's – Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> June 2018

The sun was out in force to welcome the Sharks to another flavour of Leigh team, this week Leigh East at their state of the art clubhouse, facilities & faultless 3G pitches, it all looked splendid in the sunshine, but it was almost 30 degrees & with just 11 players & no subs, all the boys were going to have to play the full match & pace themselves accordingly, not an easy job against a decent team.

A good deep, high kick off by Olly put us in an early deep defensive position as Easts tried to run it back, impressive pressure had Easts dropping the ball on the 3<sup>rd</sup> tackle as the Sharks started well, nervous start for the home team. Several strong surges by Will, Harry & Harlen took us steadily towards the Easts line but a decent looking kick by Tom on the last just trickled dead & the threat was gone.

More juggling by the Easts forwards on the 2<sup>nd</sup> tackle saw possession switch to the Sharks again & in a good field position, good yards made by Leo & Will first 2 tackles but a strange ref decision as Will went down & the ball was knocked backwards from his grasp had the ball brought back for him to play it, Brody then overran the dummy half pass from Olly with the line beckoning & we wasted a great chance again. Would they regret not capitalising on these gifts of possession & position, time would tell?

The Sharks then let Leigh take the advantage & stood around watching as their half back skirted around the right wing from in midfield after a side-ways run was allowed to go unchallenged, couple of off-loads & they had us worried, a sloppy pass to nobody then lost them ground & Olly made them pay with alert defence, a high kick was returned with interest by Louie from full back down the left edge & had the Easts defence chasing but lo & behold he stepped into touch on the 1<sup>st</sup> tackle & we turned the ball over again, the Sharks obviously wanted to spend the morning defending.

Suddenly the defence was sleep walking in the sun as we let the half backs run at the defence, standing back & not moving in & the waters parted as the No 6 dodged & side-stepped his way through the middle to score easily under the posts, that was too easy by far, conversion over & 6-0 down now after the good chances they'd had, disappointing, it was going to be toil in the heat it seemed today.

Luckily there was an immediate reply as first Leo from the restart, then a dart by Olly from dummy half, an exploratory meander up the field by Sam, followed by a muscular burst from Harlen took us to within touching distance of the line, then finished off by a second scoot by Olly who swooped over in the left corner when really nothing looked on, perfect riposte & with Toms assured conversion, back level at 6-6.

Superb vice-like defence by Leo, Luke & Olly kept Easts from exploiting the outside again, but slowness getting back outside & not holding down long enough in the tackle let Easts in again for quite a simple try, going from strong defence one minute to sloppiness the next, their own worst enemies & making life so difficult for themselves, another conversion & a try per set at the moment & down again by 12-6.

A drinks break followed after 10 minutes & the Sharks resumed with the ball, a promising set with a penalty for a high tackle mid-way though ended with a dropped ball from a drop off, still promising but not delivering.

A knock on by Easts from their own kick on the last turns the ball over to the Sharks & ends with a finger tip drop by Brody, surprisingly on the right wing, from a long looper by Harry.

Good containing for a change by the Sharks helps turn the tide & a solid set then & a good long kick for territory by Harry gets play back on the Easts line, they work the ball downfield & loft an innocuous looking kick to our line, easily dealt with by Louie, then on the 3<sup>rd</sup> tackle Easts made the mistake of not retreating fast or wide enough & Sam saw his chance, he shot like a bullet from dummy half & sped down the left edge before Easts knew he's picked up the ball & was teleported to the other end almost instantly, again not a finger laid on him, Harry converts this time & back level at 12-12. That was half-time & the turn around.

From the Leigh kick off a promising looking set is ended as Olly puts in a long kick but doesn't hold up & rolls harmlessly dead, nobody else knowing a kick was coming anyway.

Some sloppy tackling in the middle then let Leigh threaten our line again, Olly to the rescue here & Luke saves us again in the corner with desperate defence, a shallow kick is fumbled then taken in by Tom, danger averted for once. Sharks with the ball again & Sam is immediately forced into touch on the 2<sup>nd</sup> tackle & Easts have possession & territory close to our line, a surge for the line by a Leigh forward is halted as Harry makes a try saving tackle & so began the Sharks best defensive stint of the game, a whole set of 6 tackles, inches from our line & defended heroically by kids putting their bodies on the line & throwing themselves into the tackle with careless aggression, it worked though, the pressure forced the ball out & the Sharks were back on the attack.

A surging set followed, drop offs & lung bursting runs were followed by a speculative kick into space by Olly & ended by a "thank you very much" kind bounce into the hands of a speeding Sam & between the posts again, conversion by Tom & in the lead for the first time at 12-18.

Last drinks break & into the last 10, could the Sharks hold their nerve & keep their lead or add to it?

Leigh Easts on the attack & an attempted interception by Olly is impossible to take & gives Easts another 6 deep in our half, excellent, choking defence though pressurises Easts in a ball fumble & one danger averted, Harry is then dragged into touch on the 2<sup>nd</sup> tackle & back under pressure again, what are we doing, trying to commit suicide?

Great acrobatic catch from a kick through & then a smart clearing run by Sam is followed up by Luke, Olly then makes a hash of a quick pick up & scoot from dummy half & we're under pressure again.

After an injury break for Leigh the Sharks don't totally wake up again & allow the most innocent of runs to get away through the middle & a lot of very hard work is undone, trying to shoot themselves in the foot again it seemed, & allowing Leigh back in at 18-18 now after another successful conversion.

It has to be mentioned that our middle men, Will, Brody, Harvey, Harlen, Tom & Leo were getting through an enormous amount of great defensive work & were responsible for us still being in the game at this point, truly sterling work in this heat.

That really pricked the Sharks into action & to make amends straight away, & they did. A master blaster surge by Brody on the first set the scene, carried on by Tom with bodies hanging off him, two drives had taken us more than 70% of the way to the line. Then Mr Opportunist, Mr Action Man, call him what you want, Olly Fairhurst scooted from dummy half from a rare quick play the ball & weaved his way around a slowly retreating defence to slide over in the corner, topping off a

spectacular performance by him all round, pressure conversion is successful by Harry & a slender lead again at 18-24 with one set to come, could the Sharks hold the fort?

Leigh East threw everything at our line in the last set of 6 & threw the ball out right & left but the last tackle ended up about 6 inches from our line, the whistle blew & the Sharks had done it, nearly threw it away but done it the hard way, in blistering heat too. Both sets of kids need to be applauded for performing at this peak in this temperature with hardly any interchanges, truly monumental sportsmen of the highest order, a pleasure to watch but wish the Sharks wouldn't leave you on the edge of your seat that often, it's bad for the nerves.

Well that leaves the Sharks even again for the season at the half way point, 4 wins, 4 losses & a draw so far, there are two games still postponed which may be fitted in but the fixtures restart again next Sunday as we entertain Clock Face from St. Helens as the home & away venues are switched around, let's hope our Sharks can entertain us with some of their sparkling rugby!

### **Up the Sharks!**

#### **Awards:**

Parents MOM: Will Metcalfe

Coaches MOM: Luke Gledhill