

Shevington Sharks U11's vs Leigh Miners U11's – Sunday 3rd June 2018

Shoulda, Woulda, Coulda!

Another top group A side Leigh Miners visited Newburgh on a glorious Sunday in early June, coming off the back of a shock win vs Rylands Sharks to their name, this was not going to be a Sunday morning stroll in the park, that's for sure. The Sharks with the sheer luxury of a couple of subs for a change as all 13 currently available players were on show, they had to make the most of this.

Olly Fairhurst kicked off to a poorly manned left side of the Miners & the ball just rolled harmlessly in to touch half way into Miners territory, some sleepy heads there, so the Sharks had possession & position straight from the off, they attacked the Miners up the middle, but some poor choice of side-stepping & run choices made it a poor set & there were no yards made & a tame turn over resulted. The Miners made good ground down the field with their first set but a wild pass to nobody left it for the sharks to mop up gleefully. One forward surge by Brody Lucas then Olly fed Sam Kelly while the Miners defence was still retreating, they had no idea that he could skip & dance all around them down the right edge & end up under the posts without a finger being laid on him, they did then, almost too easy really, ever reliable Tom converted so 6-0 up.

Leigh needed to get into gear, they were sleep walking so far, some stern words were had & sure enough a lot more effort went in from then on, a series of strong forward bursts, helped by some wrong-footing from the dummy half on our markers who were far too close, took the Miners down the middle & incessant battering ended with them just falling over the line to get their score going, converted so all square again at 6-6, the Sharks defence not mean enough at all & hardly moving off the line, far too static & nowhere near enough communication, too quiet altogether.

The Sharks then surged forward to try to gain the ascendancy with middle men Leo Wadsworth, Tom Carter, Will Metcalfe, George Lowe & Brody to the fore, good but tough metres being gained, Harry T orchestrating right & left now & in tandem with Olly mapping out the movements, going through the hands to try to get Sam away again but Leigh now wise to this, over to the left & a kick on the 4th tackle by George was too tame & trickled dead, if only the rest of the team had known about it but all were flat-footed. A foot in touch by a Miner then gave the Sharks the ball back in the Leigh half, Rhys Clayton takes it up then George powers forward, Harlen Smith then takes it to the try line but is held up & denied, the Sharks then pull back to the right, Harry takes it to the defensive line then floats an immaculate cut out pass for Tom to clutch out of the air to roll over the whitewash, perfect symmetry & just demonstrating what they're always capable of, but don't always deliver, but a pleasure to watch though, no battering ram play, just communication, deft hands & backing up, it's easy! Alarm bells rang though when unbelievably Tom missed the conversion from in front of the posts, he scuffed it low & under the bar, his first miss for 3 games & was so significant in the end, 10-6 now.

Short water break, then back into it, Leigh Miners even more determined now & kept the ball alive in half tackles pretty well, obviously the Sharks guilty of not completing & wrapping the ball up, our defence running round like headless chickens as the Miners crossed easily again despite our seemingly blanket defence, importantly they converted successfully to take the lead for the first time & the Sharks were playing catch up, 10-12.

Sharks on the attack again & noticeable how more suffocating the Miners defence had become, all attempts at ball skills & passing moves didn't break the cover, it was tested but not broken, a weak kick on the last by Harlen wasn't deep enough & was fielded easily, Leigh were back on the attack & the Sharks were having difficulty putting the large forwards on the ground, leg drives were making good ground, the ref then missed or waived away a knock on in the tackle by a Miner & he dropped it again when trying to play the ball, there should have been a turnover there but the ref said he'd shouted held, so what? Kicks were traded by both sides in the next 2 sets, a high punt by Leigh into the in-goal, brilliantly brought back by a meandering run by Olly, then we got trapped in our own 20 metre & got out by a long boot by Olly, good chase & we had them back in their 20, still the Miners worked it downfield & another kick bounced wickedly for Sam & the Miners regained possession but the tackle count continued, a bewildering penalty to Leigh saw the tackle count begin again near our own 10 metre line?? This led annoyingly to a further score for Leigh as the Sharks left gaps out wide, tried to shoot out of the line & left bigger gaps, lack of defensive discipline here, further behind now at 10-18 after a successful conversion.

A disappointing set by the Sharks then ended up in touch when they had the whole field to attack, just concentrating on getting Sam way down the right edge, poor judgement there. The 1st half fizzled out there & the Sharks had a hill to climb, basically of their own making, not doing the things they're good at & making poor decisions elsewhere, frustration was abounding!

The Sharks then took the ball up with renewed energy from the kick off, fielded by Olly & making good ground twisting & turning, then a pocket battleship surge by Harlen, flattening defenders & carrying them with him, a third injury break there for Leigh, further pushes by Brody & Harry then another by Harlen went close again, a better kick by Harry was just out of the reach of Tom & it rolled dead, so close but far better play. Knock on by Leigh in the next set put the Sharks back on the front foot again, Sam threatens up the middle on the 1st, panicking the Miners, then Will takes it further, Leo decided he'd had enough of being shackled & powered his way over to the left in a perfect run, this was more like it now, this time Olly tried his luck at goal kicking but although it went between the posts, it went way under the bar & another failure was going to mean a lot later on, 14-18 but catching up.

Leigh got an extra set on their next foray as an attempt by Luke Gledhill to pick up a loose ball was fumbled & put us under more pressure, the try line defence held firm though as pressure forced a knock on from a dummy scoot right on the line, good choking pressure. Great set next as Sam, Harry, Brody with a deft off-load then Harlen raiding down the right looked like it was going to pay off but a weak kick on the last just trickled forward & the ball was caught on the line, chance gone for now. George & Tom along with Harvey Sadler, Brody & Will were getting through an enormous amount of tackling & producing superhuman performances, they managed to keep Leigh pinned inside their own 20 & made the mistake of giving the long boot downfield where Sam had dropped back in anticipation & readiness, he fielded the ball with lots of time before simply ambling his way forward seemingly harmlessly, then kicked it into gear & spurted down the left edge this time, a lot of flying arms & clutching fingers made no difference as he transported himself to the other end & strolled over before dallying dangerously until grounding the ball, makes the Sharks supporters nervous that, me too! Tom making no mistake with the conversion this time so back in front at 20-18 now, the game on a knife edge currently.

From the restart Leigh nearly payed the penalty for sloppy, inattentive passing & handling as Olly was fingertips away from latching onto an interception from a flighted pass that would have put a bit of much-needed daylight between the teams, so close yet.....!

Both teams exchanged sets & kicks forward, Sam not being able to replicate the earlier run, Leigh totally wary now, a rampaging run by George ended up forced into touch, then a long clearing kick by Olly went straight into a forwards hands and we were under pressure again, a further injury break for Leigh followed, Sam foiled a dangerous attacking run down the right by getting in between two players & making a timely interception, the Sharks tackles dropping off now & finding it hard to bring the runner down, the heat playing a part here obviously.

Great hands across the field took us from left to right edge & a searing scoot from Louie Fairhurst made superb ground up the middle, another 5th injury break was then needed, this all served to stop the Sharks momentum no matter how genuine the reason, it worked against our boys, a brilliant delayed short pass from Harlen to Olly, as he attacked the line, should then have seen him clean to the try line, but Olly couldn't take it in as he agonisingly spilled the pass, that was another great chance gone, frustration again. From being so close at one end then our tackling got worse as Leigh were bouncing off attempts at tackles & making ground early in the count, then spread the ball to the left with superb handling, replicating the Sharks minutes earlier, two off loads in half tackles as they swung around saw them in at the left corner from a suspiciously forward looking pass, the try stood though & it was impossible to rely on a 2 point lead to hang on, the defence had to match it then but couldn't, the conversion went over & a 2 point became a 4 point lead & the significance of the 2 missed conversions sunk in then, 4 tries apiece, but it went the opposite of at Ince a week earlier when we won just by virtue of all conversions kicked, such small margins but they make a massive difference in the end. Score at 20-24, not quite ended yet.

To compound the misery the Sharks dropped the restart from the first pass & with that went any hope of snatching a win, just threw that one away. The Miners had one last attack & should have scored easily, a simple pass out left should have seen the winger in but was sloppy & forward & Luke managed to drop on the ball, so that was the end as the whistle went & the Sharks had managed to virtually throw a slender lead away after battling so well to get back in front, all that hard work was undone with some very tired attempts at tackles, that displayed a lack of overall fitness where they have to perform for 40 minutes, there's too many breathers & moments of respite required, more stamina is needed, they almost threw it way at Ince, they managed to do it this time. So annoying because they were in control for much of the game, they Shoulda, Woulda, Coulda won this game. Next up another Leigh opponent in Leigh East, let's hope they put all those frustrations & annoyances into producing a killer performance there!

Up the Sharks!

Awards:

Coaches MOM: George Lowe

Parents MOM: Sam Kelly