

Shevington Sharks U11's vs West Bank Bears U11's – Sunday 24th June 2018

So Close, Soooooo Close!

Margins between success & failure in sport, winning & losing, can be miniscule & can rest on the bounce of a ball, slip of a foot, a wrong movement, a finger in the way, all small innocuous looking incidents but which change the way a game can go, include in that taking the collective foot off the throat of a team you have rattled & panic stricken & are desperate to do anything to break the shackles they are in, then that's what we let the Bears from West Bank in Widnes do on Sunday in virtually the last 5 minutes after looking like imposing a rare defeat on them. The Bears came with a fearsome reputation & rumours of no defeats in 2.5 seasons to date, not sure about the accuracy of that, but you could tell they weren't used to being under the pressure the Sharks put them under for nearly all the game, nearly being the operative word here as there were a few moments when they relaxed in certain areas & West Bank took full advantage to punish them. It has to be said that they were helped in no small part by some strange refereeing decisions by the opposition coaches that were contentious to say the least, watching the video back just proves this, quite a bit went virtually unnoticed & some at critical times

Played in brilliant sunshine once again & in the late 20's temperature wise & a rare full complement of 14 players on show for a change, it was clear there was an intense rivalry between these two sets of players after years of clashes between them, it simmered from the first run.

West Bank kicked off & Sam tried his hand at a wide run down the right, testing his opposite winger for speed & so began a titanic battle as he clearly wasn't willing to be passed on the outside easily with a shuddering sliding tackle. After a couple of forward surges from Harlen & Tyler, Harry kicks high to the corner & the full back collects as the defence has him pinned on his own line, can we contain them there? The first referee assistance arrives in the form of a loose carry after an offload in centre field is construed as a ball strip, so it's back to one again, cue the moans & groans from our lot. The Sharks defence can't hold out here as the Bears flick the ball out wide on the left & cross for the first try quite easily, our defence nowhere near set & allowing a quick play the ball, conversion over & 0-6 down.

The Sharks then try to get the ball through the hands, first right to Sam then left into midfield to Luke, not making a great deal of yardage though, more hands & we get further up the left through Louie, a too shallow kick from Tom is wasted as nobody puts pressure on the catcher & we give the ball away too easily. Olly starts to work like an insect from marker, he's all over the Bears & pushes them back time & again, it also becomes obvious that the West Bank No 1 is the string puller for this team, almost everything starts from him, he's 1st receiver, takes the ball aggressively up to the line, throws the odd dummy, drops off & occasionally throws a high looping pass, he's hard to handle but somebody needs to target pivot players like this & stop plays developing, the Sharks let him run riot too often today, stop him & you stop this team.

Tyler acrobatically takes a kick that's going over his head & holds on, being so tall has it's advantages I suppose, then a quick play the ball as George feeds Sam who tries his hand again & just floats around bodies as he skirts the right touchline & runs under the posts, it seems so surreal as you watch it, you only then notice that you're standing gaping with your jaw dropped aghast, he's like a will-o'-the-wisp. Tom adds the extras so it's 6-6 now.

West Bank back with the ball & a blatant knock on followed by an even more blatant forward pass over head is just waved away by the ref, veins bursting in coach's necks at this, so obvious but play just goes on, unbelievable, it almost leads to a try & would have sparked a world war if so, but Sam catches the high kick on his own line brilliantly to save the day, & the world!

The Sharks are stuck in their own half & a long high kick by Tom gets us up the other end with a great chase, it's our defences turn now. The next Bears attack fizzles out & the Sharks get the ball left though the hands again with Harlen at the fore here, they look so impressive when playing expansively like this, a quick play the ball & a brilliant, typical piece of individual opportunism by Olly as he scoots down the blind side totally undetected & slides in at the left corner, top drawer stuff & we lead for the first time, Harry slices the kick wide so it's only 10-6 now.

On about 4 or 5 occasions the Sharks have 4 in the tackle, but the Bears still manage to offload in the tackle, putting the rest of the defence under extra pressure, guilty of not clamping the ball, following one of these the No 1 attacks our static defence on our right & lays a crisp bullet pass out to the wing who's in again in the corner, conversion over & behind again at 10-12 now.

Another forward pass goes by without a glance by the ref & thankfully a further one ends up with the Sharks intercepting & we have the ball back as the Bears threaten. The 1st half ends on that note & we're still in this game & competing, hardly anything between the sides at this stage with all the team playing well & contributing.

2nd Half! A different referee for the next half but still the same contentious decisions overall, so no real change then. The Shevvy forwards get on top in the first 10 minutes & defensively dominate every twist & turn the No 1 sends the Bears into, Will, Harvey, Brody, Tyler, Tom & Leo crunch the life out of the West Bank marauders with muscular power, the Bears getting rattled now, not much is working for them. Great catch at full back by Louie & clearing run, Harlen almost breaks the line with a further surge, held back by the shorts, a drive by Tyler takes us to touching distance of the line & there's an injury break, we take the foot off the gas when they had loads of time to set a play up but Louie spots the defence short on the left, makes the call, deep ball from Olly & Louie flies for the corner & collides with the corner flag as he hurdles the last man, a bit of referee deliberating then for once we get the good fortune & the nod, the score stands & with Toms extras we're back in front at 16-12.

A timely interception by Harlen then stops another Bears raid down the left, head high tackles seem to be going unpunished also as the bears throw everything into the tackles, but the Sharks just keep on pushing, forward drive by George who twists & slips the ball to Olly who flies down the right, draws the full back & has Rhys & Louie outside him but the eventual telling ball goes behind them & into touch, great chance gone & would have put much needed daylight between the sides, a great shame as would have been a spectacular score. Tyler then puts in 3 tackles on the trot from the left wing into the middle & pushes the Bears back, things are getting desperate now, the Sharks are biting & really on top, the tackles are hurting too. The Bears kick the ball too long, another set repelled & back with the ball. Our forwards then push up the field, Tyler & Will at the front here, then a high punt from Olly is also too long on the 4th tackle.

The next Bears set produces a flagrant knock on & re-gather & play is waved on by the ref & says it went backwards, he has to have vertigo or has been on the pop early on a Sunday to adjudge that, scandalous, what made it worse was after a high chip by the No 1 was fumbled in the attempted catch by Sam they had another 6 tackles & after several zig zag runs all across the Sharks line the No 1 shot for the right corner to score a game clinching try & with the extra going over the score was

now 16-18. Bad decision making on the official's part directly contributing to the score there, just not acceptable.

Things went from bad to worse as straight from the restart we shot ourselves in the foot as Sam tried it on down the left-hand side this time, ran out of pitch and crossed the touchline on the first tackle. The Sharks then shot the other foot as from the resulting scrum we didn't have a scrum half at the base & the No 1 spotted this, flew down the blind side with a 2 on 1 on poor Sam & made far more ground than they should have ever been allowed on the first tackle, going from sublime to the ridiculous now as they work the ball to the left & an outrageous long ball that had to have gone forward sent the left winger in at the corner, cue wild celebrations by the Bears players & vexed words on the side lines, it had all fallen apart late on & spectacularly so.

The conversion went over & the score had swung so out of context with the match as the Sharks submitted 16-24, 3 tries to 4, but not for the first time they let a match they had under their control, on their terms, be bullied out of with a mixture of dubious decisions & frantic, panic play on behalf of the opposition, a travesty of justice really, but when did justice rule in rugby matches, never, you have to make your own luck & not rely on anything outside your control. I felt so sorry for them afterwards as they gave their all & then some extra, they should be proud of themselves, they'll come again though, it's all a learning curve & sometimes it's harsh.

I'm loath to blame referees for bad decisions having been one myself, but the standard here was well below what you should expect in Under 11's games, I don't want to use the word biased, but I'll leave that with you all??

Our good pals Newton Storm up next, the good times just keep on rolling, a friendly welcome awaits us all!

Scorers: Tries: Sam, Olly, Louie

Goals: Tom 2

Up the Sharks!

Awards:

Coaches MOM: George Lowe

Parents MOM: Olly Fairhurst