

Rochdale Mayfield U11's vs Shevington Sharks U11's – Sunday 22nd July 2018

In our delayed last match of the first part of the season before the summer holiday break, the skies looked sad & overcast & threatening rain for the first time in an age, thankfully it never materialised but it was a more bearable temperature for the lads to play in. But would the 3 week break since a match have any effect on the Sharks performance plus no training for 2 weeks, time would tell!

Rochdale Mayfield were the hosts & not familiar to the Sharks but were sitting one place above us in 4th spot in the Under 11's Group A placings, all suggestions pointing to a tight game, closely contested, and so it proved to be.

Rochdale kicked off & the first set with the ball for the Sharks was uneventful & made very little ground, just managing the half way line & a hurried low kick from Olly on the last tackle didn't put the opposition under any pressure, a tame beginning really. The majority of the Rochdale lads were tall & lanky with long legs, compared to tall & wide for Newton in the last game, looking like they had some speed if left in the clear. A few runs up the middle were followed by a sweeping move to their left edge which they seemed to favour on a regular basis, a fact never fully realised by the Sharks defence, catching us short constantly with the edge defenders hanging back & having to retreat rapidly, the Sharks Achilles heel it seems, a powerful run by the left winger down the edge then a cut inside was ended with a loose carry & a ball spill in the tackle, danger averted for now.

Sam scooted away from the first play the ball & made ground down the left side, not in top gear though yet, Harry then attacked the line & released Harlen through a gap with a trademark short pass & the Sharks had momentum now, Harlen offloading & releasing Olly to get the line moving, Rochdale on the back foot now as Harry repeated the dose, attacked a static defence & a short flick to Olly running back on the diagonal saw him glide through the smallest of gaps & over for the first score, this sort of move was what was needed but just didn't happen often enough, nowhere near often enough. Strangely Tom put the conversion well wide, that was a bad omen, 0-4 now.

From the restart the Sharks were penalised on the 2nd tackle for going high, they showed poor discipline today in all sorts of ways & gave far too many penalties away to really compete evenly, constantly spoiling great defence & losing ground & position to silly little niggling penalties, so annoying. At every available opportunity they tried to get Sam away down the flanks but it never worked today, he ran into countless cul de sacs & just could not get away, never really got into top speed & on the 2nd tackle in the next set he was forced in to touch, ball wasted again early in the count.

George was getting though a mountain of tackling already &, completing a third on the trot, hyper-extended his arm & hurt his shoulder & had to be helped off for the 2nd match in succession. Rochdale then coughed up possession after the short break & the Sharks had the ball in good territory, but they only managed to go backwards with a series of poor passes & fumbles, very fortunate for the kick on the last to ricochet off a Rochdale player back onto his own team mate in an offside position, very lucky indeed.

They capitalised on that with a terrific burst from Will & a cut back inside by Rhys, setting up nicely for Olly to feed the onrushing Tyler who bowled defenders out of the way to score his first try for the Sharks under the sticks, Harry adding the extras to take us to 0-10 & seemingly in control now. They really need to keep this pressure on now, pile it on, foot on the throat & all that, did it happen.....?

An enterprising chip to the left corner in the next set by the increasingly influential No 7 for Rochdale, almost came off as the final take was spilled. Tyler's tail was up now after that try & he took the ball on the 2nd tackle & ploughed downfield but should have kept hold & consolidated, instead he tried an adventurous overhead pass to release Sam but was adjudged forward, taking the foot off again & giving easy ball away.

This was only rubbed in even further as Rochdale raided down the left as our cover hadn't spread out or moved up, a couple of dummies to get him in the clear by the No 7 & he unselfishly swung a pass to a supporting wide man on the left almost on the try line as he was about to be tackled, a try that should have never been & a lesson in taking your chances when presented with them & using up all your tackles. Conversion successful so 6-10 now.

George was thankfully back on now & in the thick of it in both defence & attack, in defence aided by Harvey, Tyler, Tom, Brody & Olly in the middle, in attack the Sharks were flinging the ball out & trying to use width, but the Mayfield defence was well-disciplined in this respect & we couldn't get around the outside no matter how inventive they were, the earlier straight darts & short, sharp passes had gone now. The Sharks worked their way to the line on the last & a bit of individual brilliance & resilience by Olly got him his 2nd try, Harry fed him a deep ball from dummy half, he ran across the line, put up a diagonal punt, Luke managing to palm it back while the Rochdale defenders stood & stared while Olly never stopped chasing, collected the kind bounce to cross on an unattended right flank, a never say die attitude if ever you saw one, Tom successful with the extras so in control again at 6-16.

The Sharks had to hold out for the next set to go in with a handy lead but they weren't ready at the restart & produced panic stations, players still retreating into position, then an early infringement by Olly after 2 robust tackles when he couldn't roll out of the way at the ruck area, put Rochdale in a position they should have never been in. An almighty lucky let off then occurred as the No 7 raced between two defenders & grounded the ball, only for it to be ruled grounded short as he mistook the line, that should have given them an extra life, but it didn't.

Several good drives by Rhys & Tyler took the Sharks into the Rochdale half & looked to be on a roll as Tom powered up the middle, after he played the ball he had another push at the tackler & marker & incurred a penalty & we gave the ball away again, so frustrating as we shoot ourselves in the foot again.

This rebounded on them again as in similar fashion with a couple of dummies again to help him the No 7 raided the left flank, sucked in the tackler & slipped what looked like a forward pass to the winger & they made no mistake this time touching down in the correct place, the last set of the half & a sucker punch again, all their hard work undone! Conversion over & breathing down our necks now at 12-16, should have been miles in front at this point.

This made the half-time talk a lot more firmer than it would have been & they were told to cut out the errors & the penalties & stop taking dummies.

2nd Half: The first set, after Rochdale had taken the ball from our kick off & kicked to us on the last, started brightly enough but turned into a shambolic mess as we couldn't get the ball to a kicker on the last & Will made a mess of his desperate effort & knocked on, a real corker of a tangle they got themselves into there. Rochdale then repaid the favour & knocked on from the first play, we should have taken these free chances with glee. They made great yards from here, Tom thundering forward & taking some stopping, a move between Harry & Olly had Harry bouncing bodies off & being pulled down 5 metres away, Olly then scooted & tried his luck, off loaded to an onrushing Will but couldn't

break the cover, Tom & Tyler tried again & Harry then put a perfect high kick to the corner, the winger dropped the ball back over his own line but Sam fell over him in an attempt to get to it & ground, then the No 7 picked up & cleared the line, should have been a certain try but the chance had gone. Another penalty then for Olly being stuck in the ruck & the field position had gone also.

A further penalty from the 1st run for a high shot then took Rochdale into our half, couldn't get any worse, could it? Sam saves us on the last tackle as he pouches a difficult high ball right on the line then gets flattened, we work hard to get to the half way line but a high & too shallow kick downfield by Olly gets Rochdale rolling back again, again they raided the left edge & were in again in the corner courtesy of some great handling by the No 7, a hard fact to take but we were behind for the first time, conversion over & 18-16 down now, unbelievable.

Down at the other end after great spade work by Tom & superb off-loading on the run by Harlen, George thinks he's wound his way to the line but is brought down inches short, Rhys is also held just short, a kick close in on the last by Olly is neither a chip over or grubber & lands straight into Rochdale hands & the line is cleared again, chance wasted.

Another penalty for another high shot at the restart loses us ground again, an unlucky attempted interception by Olly is only fingertips away from coming off but it's back to 1 again, a forward pass then ends Rochdale's momentum & we waste possession & promising position again by just forcing the extra pass too much & Louie ruins a great move by just throwing the ball anywhere.

A further penalty follows for being offside at the scrum when the ball was held in & the Sharks all move off the line, it's a steady stream of penalties now, they just can't stop it. The Sharks get the ball back from a fumble in the tackle & a sneaky pass out of a three man tackle by Harry releases Sam who floats downfield, never really getting into top gear today though, George takes it further on & Harlen drops an outrageous basket ball pass to a flying Rhys down the right edge, the Rochdale defence man up though, the ball is then moved across the face of the posts & on the last Olly floats a tempting ball out to Harlen who thinks he's in at the left corner but he's grounded short in the same way as Rochdale in the first half, confused by a cone on the touchline as being on the line, he could have gone on further too, heart-breaking moment that, the score stays the same.

From their own line then & on the 3rd tackle the ball is hoofed high & long downfield, amazingly the Rochdale left winger gets to the ball first as our defence ambles back, leaving Louie to make two critical try-saving tackles to keep them out but our defence is all over the place as what should have been a winning score at the other end becomes a final nail in the coffin at the other as they stroll through non-existent tacklers in the left corner again, clocking off a little too early there boys I'm afraid & a successful conversion makes the score a very lop-sided & unrealistic 16-24 & not a true reflection of how dominant the Sharks were for most of this game, it was another match given away by our own carelessness & ill-discipline. 2nd halves don't seem to be the Sharks forte recently or maybe it was just the lack of match sharpness that made the difference & let them down in the end, they've just clung on to several games they've completely dominated & thrown away games at the end where they'd been the better side, in fact very rarely have they been the 2nd best team in any contest, small margins that win or lose games ultimately.

Up the Sharks!

Awards:

Parents MOM: Tyler Davies

Coaches MOM: Harvey Sadler