

Old Amplefordians v Old Rutlishians

The sun was shining and the vociferous support was down in numbers for the first game of the season, which unfortunately resulted in a frustrating 42-28 loss for the OAs against an effective Old Rutlishians side. The oppo were well drilled and up for the game, but most will feel we could and should have made our presence known more emphatically in our return to Surrey 2.

The OAs built some good early pressure, making their way into the opposition 22 twice in the first ten minutes thanks to some aggressive carrying across the park. However, new season jitters laid waste to our accuracy and we were turned over on the ground on both occasions. This remained a theme throughout the game, the Old Ruts beating their bigger counterparts to the ruck regularly and slowing OAs ball or turning it over. This made it a very difficult for scrum halves Jorge Albert and Coel Mahoney to get quick ball to the backs – a huge shame as we carried devastatingly when the ball did work its way wide, with Will Shep and Clubman Jamie Reid especially making significant inroads. Our team is littered with strong ball carriers, but we need to work harder off the ball to support them.

The first 20 minutes were a cagey affair, with defence far outshining either team's attack. Just as the OAs were repelled from the Old Ruts line, we twice closed out the visitors' thrusts into our 22. Will Theile, a stand-out performer on the day for the OAs, produced a strong jackal close to his line early on, whilst debutant Ronan Hunter-Blair stymied the visitors' next assault on the OAs line, up like a salmon out of the line to claim the intercept, before setting off on a bursting break of his own. The OAs further frustrated their opponents' attack stealing their first three lineouts and competing well in the scrum.

Unfortunately, a lack of fitness told towards the half hour mark, allowing the Old Ruts to work the ball round our defence to their pacey winger who broke down the right wing. Josh Grogan was the only defender to get close to him but was unlucky to hit him high in a last-ditch tackle attempt, resulting in a yellow card and penalty try. Will Shep quickly responded with a try of his own, breaking several tackles on his way to the try line with a physical carry characterising his performance ball-in-hand all game. Jamie Reid slotted the first of four difficult touchline conversions to level the scores.

Frustratingly, the half time interval was book ended by two gifted tries for the Old Ruts – a tap and go penalty from their own five metre which nobody reacted to and a dropped Garryowen allowed the oppo to build a two-try lead.

The second half saw the OAs score three more good tries. The first was set up by another strong run from Shep, allowing Hamish Atkinson to poach a classic Hammo short range finish a few phases later. The second was mauled over by the forwards and dotted down by George O'Connell after a pinpoint penalty touchfinder from Grogan set up the lineout. The third try was a standout, with Jamie Reid receiving the Old Ruts kick off and bursting into their half, before offloading to Digby Walker to beat the last defenders and touch down.

Unfortunately though, the OAs gifted the oppo three further soft tries of their own to put the game beyond doubt. Ronan HB was charged down for one, and we were exposed both out wide and tight to the ruck for the final two. Our discipline and communication will have to improve for our next home game against Old Caterhamians on Saturday, who proved how dangerous they are by scoring 78 points against the Old Wellingtonians. 1 to 18, the OAs carried hard and tackled well, but more awareness and effort off the ball would go a long way in helping us to record better results going forward.

Thank you very much to the Old Rutlishians for a good game, we'll look forward to the return fixture! Best of luck to your two injured lads – get well soon.

To end on a positive note, congratulations Ronan HB and Charlie McCann on their first OARFC caps. They both played very well and we're delighted to have you join the club. Charlie contributed well to a strong set piece and carried bravely all game. Ronan put in a very assured performance, initially from 15 before switching to 10 from where he controlled the game well and put some much-needed zip into our back line.

A shout out must also go to Ben Pearce who put in a characteristic abrasive performance and led very well in his first game as OAs captain.

Mom: Will Shep
DoD: Josh Grogan

Team Sheet:

C. McCann; G. O'Connell; J. Botica; B. Pearce (c); B. Cogley; W. Theile; D. Walker;
M. Hardy; J. Albert; J. Grogan; W. Shepherd; J.A.T. Reid; J.S.P. Reid; C. Mahoney;
R. Hunter-Blair

Subs: H. Atkinson, J. Rollings, C. Oxlade