

## Shevington Sharks U11's vs Crosfields Cobras U11's – Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2018

In a hurriedly re-arranged mid-week game switched from the original away one to a rare home fixture due to the deluge affected pitches in Warrington, our Sharks 11's came up against arguably the best side in this age group, certainly the most consistent over the years, Crosfield Cobras, they have a formidable reputation that precedes them, they could probably have done with maybe an easier opponent coming off the back of the Rylands mauling but in any attempt to be the best you've got to play & beat the best & I don't think there'll be any easy games this season in Group A as this is the reward for such consistent performances last season, they're in the elite group now, no hiding places there.

It was a rare beautiful evening & perfect for rugby, cold but fresh & for once there was a decent line-up of available players to feel confident about, even having the luxury of subs on the side-line, so everyone got a decent run out.

The Sharks got a taste of the ferocity of physical challenges to come straight from the off, the kick off by the Cobras was scuffed & just scooped into the air, just clearing the regulation 10 metres, Brody Lucas did well to judge the awkward bounce & held on as he was buried beneath a stampede of Cobras, George Lowe ran strongly to the right edge & slipped a pass to Luke Gledhill who won't thank him for the hospital pass as he was duly dumped into the sitting bunch of Cobra subs on the side-line, scattering them mercilessly. From the resulting scrum we got a glimpse of the ball handling skills of their 2 halves, 6 & 7, who seemed to have the ball on a string & proceeded to weave their magic with the ball shifting effortlessly from wing to wing & had the Sharks chasing ghosts, they shifted to the right then switched back to the left to open the scoring out wide, the conversion hit the bar so down within the first 2 minutes, 0-4.

The Sharks went on the attack again, Leo Wadsworth flattened as he tried to worm through the middle, but the Sharks through the ball about & ran strongly, middles William Metcalfe, Brody & George really did their jobs & allowed the two Harry's, Brandon & Townsend, to give the ball some air to the wide men. It was noticeable though that the Cobras kept their line consistent, it was hard to suck them into the middle, leaving little room to attack out wide. Oliver Fairhurst did spot a slight gap though & rode a couple of tackles, broke clear & when he was closed down 10 metres out Townsend was backing up closely outside on the right, a floated pass & a step back inside the last 2 remaining defenders did the trick as he crossed unopposed, Tom Carter converted & the Sharks were leading 6-4, could we dream, maybe not?

This only prodded the Cobras into more attacking play & the box of tricks came out as they attempted every passing move in the book, along with some not in the book, it didn't all come off & it took some alertness from the Sharks to stop an avalanche of tries, they kept up their defensive efforts & George, Tom & Ollie were working overtime to keep the Cobras at bay. I do think though that a state of watching in awe of the half back play on display started to creep in as the ball flew from side to side instead of stepping in & putting a stop to it, a case of too much respect, too much admiration was being shown to the opposition, but you can't blame them, it was impressive to watch, most super league teams can't handle as deftly as they can. There was the perfect aerial punt to an onrushing team mate to pounce & score, two perfect solo tackles by George on the right were wasted as Crosfields just worked the ball over to their right edge & were over again, our defence just following the ball instead of keeping the line spread & intact, just a lack of defensive

discipline there. The first half ended with 5 tries to one, 6-28 to Crosfields & time for a harsh team talk & some re-grouping for the 2<sup>nd</sup> half.

Told to imagine it was still 0-0 & to start again, this was taken on board all round, defence was tightened up & got more physical & got really quite tasty in parts as the Cobras were complaining of elbows & other joints being used in the tackle to hold heads down, I couldn't possibly comment on that but it shook them up quite a bit & they didn't have it all their own way, Harlen Smith came to the fore here & a perfect dummy was given & taken as he swept through the remaining cover to slide in for our 2<sup>nd</sup> try, again converted by Tom, 12-28 at that point.

Spurred on by this the Sharks sprang into life & really flew at the Cobras, Brody drove up the middle & was brought down inches from the line, similar surges by William & Harlen actually got them over the line but both were held up expertly by the Cobras defence which remained calm & composed in the face of this onslaught, indeed Harlen could have had a hat trick as he was put through a gap by a bullet pass from Townsend as he attacked the line but a mix of a glimpse of the onrushing defence & the try line beckoning made it harder to take the pass in & the chance was spilled, nevertheless Harlens all-round powerhouse performance bristling with aggression & passion earned him a share of the coach's MOM award. The returning Rhys Clayton showed up well in attack & began to make forays into the Cobras defence, ably backed up by Ben Galbraith. I was aching to see Sam Kelly get a chance to use his speed when a chance came to get him in the clear & one such occasion came & he flew down the vacant left edge but annoyingly the Crosfield cover appeared from nowhere again & closed his space down, chance gone. Louie Fairhurst had to switch to full back duties for a time & performed really admirably, great positional awareness, a safe pair of hands & ran the ball back so well, he shared the MOM award & well deserved it was.

As the Sharks defensive bite started to have an effect, the doubts began to start & cracks started to appear in the Cobras attack & there was a spate of dropped balls early in their sets which was gifting the Sharks great position & possession in the Cobras half, indeed it was as if they had 5 or 6 back to back sets in the Crosfield 20 metre area & you felt sure something was going to come out of it, but this only brought out magnificent try line blanket defence from the Cobras, desperate to keep the Sharks out, our lads were guilty of chucking these gift chances away as they never varied their attack & just resorted back to battering away at the same point in the wall, it was never going to fall & any attempt to get the ball wider was too slow & the line speed of Crosfields was like lightning, snuffing out any possible move before it got going, it needed a bit of cleverness to change the style of attack, but it never came & that was where it all ended, just frustration & disbelief were etched on our kids faces at the end.

It was a game of 2 halves as it was only 2 tries to 1 to the Cobras in the 2<sup>nd</sup> period & the Sharks actually dominated for most of it & were really unlucky not to add to their score, they can all be proud & hold their heads high that they virtually matched the best team around for a lot of this game & all it needs now is for this group of players to perform together consistently again & again to really gel as a team, sometimes they look like strangers, we need some decent weather, good playing numbers & a good run of games to start to string some performances together like we know they can, they've had a tough baptism in their early intro to Group A but I think they can use all this to strengthen their future form & galvanise themselves for the challenges to come.

## **Up the Sharks!**

### **Awards:**

MOM: Harlen Smith / Louie Fairhurst