

Youth Reports - 14/2/10

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Under 16's Shelford 24 Cheshunt 12

A depleted Shelford squad made the journey to Cheshunt to play a stodgy game on an extremely stodgy pitch. With around 10 absentees due mainly to the half-term break, Shelford had to ring the changes yet again where we were mainly lacking cover in the back row. This impaired Shelford's usual sharpness at the breakdown area as our tacklers went too high to bring their opponents down which enabled their opponents to stay on their feet and play their preferred mauling game.

Shelford chose to take advantage of the hugely sloping pitch in the first period and had lots of territory, but failed to work the phases well enough to create opportunities out wide later. Our tendency was to go wide too early against an organised defence and this put pressure on our ball retention. When we did 'go through phases' we straight away created an opportunity for Lewis Green to race clear for a 5-0 lead. A James Clare 'crash-ball' put us a couple of scores clear, converted by Lewis Cracknell for a 12-0 lead.

Cheshunt responded well using their favoured mauling game, but Shelford defended poorly around the fringes generally being too high in the tackle yet again as they crashed over which was converted to bring it back to 12-7. An injury to captain Sam Perry disrupted our back row even further which meant having two 'hookers' in the back row as well as making a mess of our lineout ball.

Shelford finished the half on the front foot as more possession was recycled a number of times for James Clare to burst through once more again converted by Cracknell for a 19-7 half-time lead.

Shelford's defensive game improved markedly in the second period as we were more competitive around the fringes with scrum half Alex Long being very prominent in this area. Nathan Taylor and Ben Foster also started to hit rucks at pace and Shelford started to look a little more dangerous with some quicker ball. The game failed to flow though as a number of infringements started to creep in making it a 'stop-start' affair. Shelford scored one solitary try in the second period, but what a beauty it was as both Lewis Cracknell & James Clare drew defenders and put Lewis Green into the corner for a 24-7 lead to make the game safe.

Cheshunt opened up late in the game with some strong running with their full back and wingers coming more into the play. They got the final try of the game when Shelford missed a regulation tackle on the Cheshunt winger to bring the final score back to 24-12. Under 14's Bedford 22 Shelford 24 The curse of the school holidays had well and truly struck at the doughty Shelford squad. French exchanges and ski trips had left us with 14 fit players. No doubt some apparatchik at Twickenham was already preparing a treatise linking the bourgeoisification of half term with England's poor performance against Italy but that wasn't our problem - we had to face the mighty Bedford without the front row that had represented Cambridgeshire in midweek and with a squad that was about 50% back row forwards. Bedford realised our predicament and sportingly loaned us the powerful Adam to play in the front row. Inevitably from Shelford's first attack, Adam found himself part of a two man overlap with the line at his mercy. The dilemma was etched into his furrowed brow - could he score against his teammates? He managed to avoid what would no doubt have been a serious team fine by shovelling the ball onto second row Sam Jones who flopped over in the corner. A magnificent touchline conversion by James Knoop gave Shelford a 7-0 lead. Sam turned out to be brilliant for 8 minutes before returning to the obscurity of the second row boilerhouse. He caught the restart and bullocked through the Bedford defence to set up field position on the hosts' 5 meter line. Shelford went through the phases and it was Sam who went over again for the second score. Shelford had managed to impose their game on Bedford and our slick handling had our opponents on the back foot. A mazy run by winger James Knoop led to the third try which he converted himself. Then from a five meter tap penalty scrum half George James capped an excellent performance by sneaking in under the Bedford radar. Half time score 24-0 to the makeshift Shelford squad. We could see the Bedford big guns warming up for the second half and we knew it would be a different story after the interval. Bedford had a plan to kick behind our blind side winger to use the pace of their wingers to put our back three under pressure. It worked pretty well as they forced a succession of attacking scrums from which their right winger scored three tries from close to the Shelford line. The momentum was against us now and the team showed an old failing - an inability to change the game plan and keep the ball. We were still trying to play the old expansive game when we should have been keeping it tight and trying to play the game in the Bedford half. Easy enough to say from the touchline but the boys were up against it as they had played the whole game and the Bedford team was fresh and strong. Bedford scored their fourth try under the posts and with the conversion had cut the deficit to 2. Could Shelford hold on? Knoop put the restart deep and Bedford tried to run it back. Desperate tackling pinned Bedford in their own half and finally the referee blew for full time. Shelford had just shaded it against Bedford again by 24 points to 22. It was a wonderful effort by the team - great team spirit, excellent rugby, everyone working hard for each other. Thanks also to Bedford for lending us players and playing the game in the right spirit.