

BLOWN AWAY!

Huddersfield YMCA RUFC v Sandal RUFC by Duncan Robinson

I decided to attend a rugby match at Laund Hill, where Augustinians Cricket Club play their home matches. They share this facility with Huddersfield YMCA Rugby Club and, being something of a rugby fan, I went to see them play Sandal Rugby Club.



Sandal, Wakefield, is famous for its castle

The YM fielded a lot of youngsters with five players 18 or under and a further four under 20, so it was a big ask to get anything from the game against a side who are the runaway leaders of the league. Problems were also compounded by the fact that influential stand-off Jamie Marsden came off with an injury, as did prop James Watson, leaving the side very short of experience in the backs and front row.

That said the YM made a game of it and never gave up trying, putting in some huge tackles and coming close to scoring on two or three occasions. Eventually it came down to sheer power and, with Sandal having three enormous guys in their ranks, every time they ran straight they made good ground and forced the visitors onto the back foot.

The game started briskly and Sandal quickly set their stall out and showed the direction of their game. With three very powerful forwards on the park they looked to set the ball up and feed it to one of the big men coming onto it at pace; it was very much men against boys and the big men crossed the line

virtually every time they took the ball, taking up to three or four defenders to pull them down. In doing this they created so much space out wide that the YM were always going to be stretched. Jamie Marsden looked good in defence and his tactical kicking kept Sandal out but it was never going to be enough.

On 14 minutes one of the Sandal big men, number 8 Richard Wade, forced his way through the defence to score out wide of the posts; the conversion was missed but the scene was set for the remainder of the game. 5-0

On 21 minutes the ball was spun out to winger Simon Frewin to go over in the left corner. Once again the conversion was missed but the score moved up to 10-0.

On 25 minutes James Watson took a bang to the head and had to leave the field, being replaced by Martin Dalton who went on to do a stalwart job in the front row alongside Johnny Saville who was making his first appearance at hooker. Play had only just resumed when Marsden then left the field after an injury to his knee. Canning moved up from full-back to stand-off and Chris Belton came off the bench to full-back.

The new line-up held up quite well and although they came close on a couple of occasions Sandal could not quite finish with a try - until the 45th minute of the half when they drove the YM back over their own line from a maul and once again it was big man Wade who claimed the score. The wind again got the better of the conversion which left the score at half time 15-0.

The next Sandal try came 5 minutes into the second half. This time it was no.7 Sean Maguire who took his opportunity well, saw a gap in the stretched line and went straight through it for a neat try under the posts. Although not one of the 'big three', Maguire looked very accomplished and was involved in most of the activity in and around the fringes, doing exactly what a good back rower ought to be doing. The conversion by no.19 Smith was good and the score moved to 22-0

YM came back well and had quite a reasonable spell pushing Sandal back and threatening their line. Unfortunately they had the beating of themselves on each occasion and failed to hold the final pass, passed it forward, or simply gave the ball away in the tackle.

Having tried but failed to turn pressure into points, the YM were then forced back onto the defensive when Sandal started to throw the ball about in the way they had done in the first half. Again using the big men was highly effective and caused the YM defence all sorts of problems. Special mention should be made of rookie colt Proctor on the YM right wing. His defence was superb and he had the measure of his man or anybody else who dared to trespass onto his wing all game. For a young lad he played with great confidence and with this type of fearless attitude he is going to be close to claiming a regular first-team place.

A rolling maul took the Sandal men forward again, making maximum use of their generous weight advantage and it was substitute prop Norbury who came off the side of the maul to crash over for another Sandal try. Again the kick was a formality. 29-0

YM were visibly tired and although they continued to put in the tackles they were struggling to hold back the Sandal tide. Time and again the big men cut the defensive line to bits and pulled it in all directions leaving the remaining defenders depleted and exposed.

Eventually hooker Sam Tee got his rewards for all his hard graft. He had bashed and bullied the YM defence throughout the afternoon, and although operating in short bursts he was highly effective at driving the ball into the heart of the defence and coming out the other side still in possession of it. This time there was no last-gasp tackle as he forced his way through yet again only to find the line at his mercy. The conversion was added and the score moved up to 36-0.

In the final minutes it was Sam Tee again who barrelled his way through the remnants of a tired YM defence to get the last score of the match, which was again converted. Final Score: 43-0.

Although they were well beaten by the best team in the league by some margin this season, this was no disgrace. The youngsters showed lots of guts and determination and for lengthy periods of the game held their own and even looked like scoring on two or three occasions.