

## “A DRAPPIE OR TWO”

### Gordon v Southern Districts – Round 15 Tooheys NEW Shute Shield

Look, I have a confession to make. I didn't have a busy week last week and I didn't run out of time. I have watched the Gordon v Warringah game about 7 times and I simply don't know what to write. It wasn't because I am haunted by images of the face of the competition's sponsor going crazy hanging over the fence in the Trumper Stand corner, to celebrate Dave Harvey's try, it is just that it is difficult to describe what happened.

I have spoken to many "non-rugby" people in the last fortnight, who have commented that it was one of the best and most entertaining games of rugby that they have watched. But it was a funny game. The Rats, with the class and speed of a team with 8 Super 14 players, were able to hit back expertly on the counter attack, which punished every Highlander mistake in the first 40 minutes, as they took a 24 points to nil lead to the half-time break.

The hosts were in danger of letting their guests run away with the game. However, it was the Highlanders who came blasting back to within 3 points with less than 10 minutes remaining and looking favourites to finish the job. It was only a terrifically well-worked move from the halfway line, where Brett Sheehan put Josh Holmes away to score with 5 minutes remaining which secured the result and break the home-team's hearts. Although, in a great sign of commitment, Gordon scored after the bell to secure what may prove to be 2 crucial bonus points.



I will write a full report on this game at some stage and it will appear on the website. Presumably this will happen when I work out what happened.

#### **Chris Alcock Scores against the Rats**

Following the close loss, the Highlanders travelled down to Sylvania Waters to attempt to get back into the winners' circle with a fixture

against Southern Districts. Coach Fear announced during the week that, despite the 53 - 13 disposal of the Rebels in Round 4 at Chatswood, this was a danger game for the men in tartan. In that fixture, Souths jumped out to a 13 point lead after 15 minutes, before they lost key duo Tim McGann and Dave Pusey, which led to a loss of composure and an avalanche of points.

With a team sheet that included a first class front row of Dan Plamer, Nic Henderson and Brumbies' squad member John Ulugia and a smattering of Super 14 talent in Kane Douglas and inside centre Josh Tatupu, this was a very different team to the one that ran onto the park for the merger club at Chatswood. Unfortunately for the hosts, their most damaging attacking player, Rob Horne was only running the water.

And Fear's... what's the word ... apprehension, was more than justified as after a short arm penalty off shortly after the kick off, the Rebels went into attack. Gordon's defence held strong and repelled the ridiculous effort of a Southern Districts' player trying to go over the

top of a ruck NFL style and was held up. But after a 5 metre scum, South's outside centre Chris Kerr out paced the central defence to the try line and inside 5 minutes the Highlanders were 7 - nil down. That pain was doubled 10 minutes later, when Tatupu sliced through 35 metres out and scored, with Nathan Sievert adding the extras.

Whilst the set piece was strong, whatever the Highlanders attempted, they were met with solid and organised defence, which often led them into error. By contrast, whenever the home side took possession of the ball, there was something happening. However, to Gordon's credit, their defence held strong for the final 25 minutes as did the scrum, which was no mean feat. It was the Highlanders who finished the scoring with Dave Harvey slotting a penalty goal two minutes prior to the oranges.

#### **Ed Gower with a clean Lineout win.**

Whilst the tarvelling fans may have been as stunned as the locals were vocal, and my word aren't they vocal, Souths played well enough to deserve their lead of 14 - 3.

Gordon had to realise that they were in a very tough fight against a very talented young side. The team broke from their huddle with an intense stare that strived to get on top in the contest. However, immediately after the break, rangy second rower, Matt "Bowey" Trouville charged down field and put pressure on the Highlanders' defence. The performance from the men in tartan picked up straight after this passage of play and Gordon pressed to get on top in the game. After 17 minutes, Harvey added another 3 points as the Rebels were caught offside.



The Highlanders entered a passage where they enjoyed a large amount of ball and



pressed to convert that into points and to claw back the lead. However, South's defence held strong, with the very disciplined approach that one would expect when half of the backline grew up in the Cronulla Sharks' junior programme and former League international and Australian coach Chris Anderson being involved with the Club.

#### **Dane Haylett-Petty slices through**

With Gordon's attack coming to nothing, Souths eventually wrested back control of the ball and embarked on their own sustained attack on the visitor's line. It was the Highlanders' turn to demonstrate the

defence that has been a feature of their play in the last two seasons. In the last two seasons, that defensive effort probably would have been sufficient to force a mistake from Souths; but not today, as the impressive big man Kane Douglas found a gap to touch down and with another conversion, make the score 21 - 6.

Coach Fear cleared his bench and hooker Ben Whittaker again showed his immense talent, by ripping in at the break down and adding an extra element in the scrum. The scrum was a massive battle all afternoon, as two extremely talented packs smashed into each other. The Highlanders may have just shaded their hosts for the points; but it was a massive South's scrum on Gordon's feed on their own quarter line that turned the ball over, which led to Douglas's try.

**Ben Whittaker's impact off the bench has been crucial.**

Within the last 10 minutes, the Highlanders were finally able to string a movement together that out flanked their opposition to allow Matt McDougall to score his twelfth try of the season. However, with Harvey unable to add the extras, Gordon was in danger of leaving the Shire without even a bonus point.



After the kick off Gordon came marching back to the southern (or non-power line) end of the ground and were camped on the quarter line for the last few minutes. Whilst another try could not be garnered, a small consolation was a penalty after the bell on the quarter line, when the Rebels were caught offside, which Harvey slotted to secure a bonus point as the match ended 21 - 14.

It was a disappointing result for Gordon's aspirations and the place on the table relative to their hosts. However, it is hard not to be enthusiastic about the performance of this young Rebel's team. They have been a team in the last few seasons that have showed glimpses



of talent but have had an inability to maintain continuity as their most talented have sought other opportunities.

**Matt McDougall has scored 12 tries so far this season**

It is vitally important to the legitimacy of this competition that the Shire is well represented at the elite club level, considering the large numbers of juniors in the area. All too often in the past too many good players have

been lured away to play for other clubs. As alluded to earlier, a large number of players in Souths' list grew up playing league and it is a fantastic result for rugby to attract this talent away from the mungoes.

This weekend is the return of the local derby round, as the Pirates return to the scene of their most galling afternoon in 1981, when their most bitter rivals sent them down to the old second division, when Gordon's Wallaby fullback Laurie Monaghan slotted a late field goal.

Northern Suburbs have had an inconsistent year so far, with some great wins against Easts and Manly and pushing the Highlanders all the way in round 5, only for former Pirate Vinnie Byrne to swoop on a dropped ball to score. However, there is no doubt that they will not want for any motivation this weekend, as they come to the Chatswood, 7 days after the tragic death of Senior Vice President and life member Bill Debney, who collapsed in front of the Duncan Thompson Stand at the end of the Pirates game against Randwick. Bill was 55 and is survived by his wife and three children and the Club's thoughts are with them. Despite witnessing Norths' loss on the weekend, it can only be hoped that Bill died at place he loved enjoying a great passion. It would be nice to think that we could all go out the same way. Rest in peace.

After a couple of close losses and their drop down the table, the Highlanders are desperate to chalk up a win to get their season back on track. With a very difficult 6 weeks to follow, it is a crucial game to Gordon's chances of playing in September.

Get down to Chatswood to support your team; they need you there in their most intense battle of the season. As has been mentioned in this article in the past, it doesn't matter the respective positions on the table that these foes occupy, there is something special in this (as in most) local derbies, that brings out the best in these two sides.

Ben Whittaker is handed his first full start and Billy Ratu comes into 8, whilst Chris Alcock replaces Paulie Tuala at blindside flanker, who will come off the bench as a fresh reserve.

This promises to be a cracker.

See you from the Cerdic Pike Stand.