

Saturday 6th January 2018
London South West 3
Match Report by Jim Dixon

PRFC 26 – 5 Trojans



Picture by Lesley Gicquel

Portsmouth welcomed Trojans to Rugby Camp for this first match of the New Year. With Portsmouth lying in 3rd place just 3 points ahead of Trojans in 4th. This was a vital game for the home side if they were to keep the pressure on the leaders. In their first encounter Portsmouth held on for a narrow 35 - 37 away victory after letting a decent lead slip, so they knew this would be a tough match.

Trojans kicked off proceedings and Portsmouth were soon awarded a penalty and from the resultant touch kick took a line out on the Opposition 22. A penalty against Portsmouth saw a scrum to Trojans but the touch clearance was outside the 22 and went directly into touch giving a scrum back to Portsmouth. Another penalty against Trojans saw Portsmouth make further inroads into the Opposition territory with a kick to touch giving them a line out 5 metres from the Trojans goal line. From the line out Portsmouth were able to get a good drive going and forced their way over for a try scored by No.8 Rhys Bowen. The conversion by Curtis Barnes was successful and Portsmouth took a 7 - 0 lead on 6 minutes. Portsmouth were soon on the attack again and a good move involving the backs saw them take the ball from deep in their half into the Opposition 22 only for an infringement by Trojans to halt proceedings with a penalty to the Home side. Portsmouth themselves were then penalised giving a scrum to Trojans who managed to get in a good touch clearance. The game then swung from end to end with both sides trying to gain meaningful territory. At this point Portsmouth lost their hooker with a broken nose. Jack Easterbrook went on to the back row allowing Anthony Fooks to take the No.2 position. Shortly after that exchange, prop Ryan Wilkie had to leave the field with a back spasm and he was replaced by Finn Parry. Trojans were then able to close the gap with a well taken try that started from a scrum on their 22, moving the ball quickly up the wing with some good interpassing they eventually crossed for a try in the corner. The conversion missed and the score closed to 7 - 5 with only a few minutes of the half remaining. Portsmouth then swung straight back into the attack and a good run down the wing by Tom Whitehouse was unfortunate not to have resulted in a try with the final pass unable to find the support player. Portsmouth increased their lead when good possession by them led to Barnes side stepping his way over for a try midway between the touch line and the posts. He was able to convert his try and the lead increased to 14 - 7 with the whistle signalling the end of the first half.

SECOND HALF.

Portsmouth kicked off the re-start and shortly after that centre Luke Simmons came off to be replaced by Mark Ovens, making a welcome return after a lengthy lay off due to a knee injury. A Trojans line out 5 metres from the Portsmouth try line saw the Visitors drive for a try but excellent defensive work by the Portsmouth pack held them out and eventually although they had crossed the line a Portsmouth player had managed to prevent the touch down. This resulted in a scrum to

Trojans 10 metres from the Portsmouth line for an earlier infringement. The Portsmouth pack responded in the best way possible with a clean strike against the head and then managed to clear the ball way up field resulting in the defending player being tackled in possession giving a scrum to Portsmouth. From this scrum the Home side were able to move the ball across the field and then back again into the hands of centre Dan Gates who raced clear for a try wide out. The conversion missed but the score now stood at 19 - 5 after 12 minutes of the re-start. This was Gates' first start since late September following an operation on his knee. Stuart Davies then had to leave the field and was replaced by Luke Simmons, with Barnes moving to full back and Simmons taking his place on the wing. Portsmouth were now putting their Opponents under considerable pressure and forcing them to loose possession on occasions. Eventually a Portsmouth scrum 15 metres from the Trojans line saw them put in a magnificent drive that took them all the way to the try line with Fooks being attributed with the touch down. Barnes' conversion was successful and their lead extended to 26 - 5. That was the 4th. Try and thus that all important bonus point was achieved. Trojans then took the attack back to Portsmouth from the re-start but a knock on only gave Portsmouth possession once more. Again Portsmouth were forced to defend for the remaining 5 or so minutes and although Trojans had in fact crossed the line, once again Portsmouth had managed to get under the ball thus preventing a score and the final whistle went. Although Portsmouth had left 2 or 3 tries out there through some wrong decisions it was never the less a very satisfactory win over a good side. The Trojans back row always posed a threat and their No.10 kicked well.

This win cemented Portsmouth's 3rd.place now on 53 points, 8 points clear of Trojans still in 4th place. In the game between the top two Old Emanuel surprisingly lost their unbeaten record to Old Cranleighans 20 - 6. That result sees both teams on 59 points with Old Cranleighans taking over the top spot on point's difference from Old Emanuel. With Portsmouth only 6 points behind the top two and a better points difference than Old Emanuel of 328 against 269 there is everything still to play for. Next week sees Portsmouth in another local derby, this time away at Petersfield. After a long Christmas break it was good to get some rugby under their belts again although it did take a while for Portsmouth to get into their stride. Hopefully, having got that break out of their system they can continue in their quest to challenge the top two. Petersfield's away game at New Milton was postponed due to bad weather.

TEAM=

French, Hoolihan, Wilkie.
Gicquel, Fitzpatrick.
Brock, Fooks, Bowen.
Duffus, Richards.
Whitehouse, Gates, Simmons, Barnes.
Davies (C).

Replacements=

Parry, Easterbrook, Ovens.

Other Portsmouth Results:-

Portsmouth 2nd Xv 55 – 5 Andover 2

Millbrook 2 vs Portsmouth 3, Postponed, waterlogged pitch

Sunday 7th January 2018

Chew Valley Ladies 24 – Portsmouth Valkyries 36 (Valkyries now through to the Quarter Finals of the Women's Junior Cup)

Colts 15 – 4 Tottonians Colts