

## **Portsmouth Rugby Football Club**

### **Match Report – 1<sup>st</sup> XV**

**London SW Three**

**Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> April 2018**

**By Jim Dixon**

**PRFC 40 – 19 Old Emanuel**

Portsmouth took on Old Emanuel at Rugby Camp in this last outing of the current campaign. Having lost the opening match at the start of the season 37 - 34 they were determined to not only win the match but also preserve their unbeaten home record for this season. The team was led out by Club Captain Ian French playing his last 1st.XV match as he retires at the end of what has been an outstanding career. He joined Portsmouth aged 18 and has been an ever-present since then as a second row before converting to prop. Now aged 41 he feels it is time to hang up his 1st.XV boots. He has been Club Captain for the past 2 seasons and although he will be sorely missed he surely deserves some rest time after playing 326 senior matches for the Club.

With scrum half Dan Holbrook unavailable Simon Morgan resumes that role and Lee Chandler takes the No.10 slot with Gareth Richards away on honeymoon. Matt Farnes takes the right wing position with Curtis Barnes moving to fullback.

Old Emanuel got proceedings underway and Portsmouth were unable to gather the ball cleanly giving O.E's possession and they pressed hard before kicking to touch just inside the Portsmouth 22. From the line out Portsmouth were able to take the ball deep into O.E's territory mainly through some excellent work by centre Jordan Hunter. Portsmouth's line out was not functioning well initially and that gave O.E's the chance to gain a foothold in the home sides' half. With both sides trying to gain the advantage it was O.E's who struck first with a well taken drop goal after a period of attack by them had been kept at bay by some resolute Portsmouth defence. After 16 minutes the score was Portsmouth 0 - O.E's 3.

Portsmouth were gradually getting into a rhythm and a good break by the home side saw a scoring chance lost when the final pass didn't go to hand. From a line out Portsmouth were able to set up a good catch and drive and with the ball then spun wide it was winger Luke Simmons who finished off the move with a try wide out. The difficult conversion missed and Portsmouth went into the lead 5 - 3 after 23 minutes. Ian French then came off to be replaced by Finn Parry. O.E's were soon back on the attack and only terrific defence prevented them from grounding the ball after they had crossed the Portsmouth try line. From the 5 metre scrum Portsmouth managed to win the ball against the head and clear their line. A penalty against Portsmouth saw O.E's retake the lead 5 - 6 with about 7 minutes of the half remaining. Another scoring chance went begging when a good move by Portsmouth saw them take the ball from their 22 right up to the opposition 22 and only a forward pass prevented a try from being scored. O.E's then had a chance to extend their lead but a good cover tackle by Matt Farnes prevented a certain try. Following yet another penalty against Portsmouth, O.E's were able to extend their lead to 5 - 9 and the half time whistle went.

HALF TIME.

Portsmouth got the second half underway and had the benefit of the steady wind at their backs. Rhys Bowen had to leave the field and Greg Hoolihan took his place. Hoolihan went to No.2 with Fooks moving to No.7 and Brock moving to No.8. 5 minutes into the second half O.E's were able to further extend their lead following a penalty against Portsmouth making the score 5 - 12 in the visitors favour. Lee Chandler then came off to be replaced by Tom Whitehouse. He went to the right wing and Matt Farnes moved to No.10. At a scrum to O.E's 5 metres from their line Portsmouth demolished their pack gaining a penalty in the process. This was repeated 3 more times and eventually the referee's patience was tested too far and he awarded a penalty try to the home side taking the score to 12 - 12 with 16 minutes gone. From the re-start Jack Easterbrook caught the ball and made good ground before passing to the backs and eventually centre Hunter finished off a great move with a score under the posts. Morgan's conversion was true and Portsmouth went into a 19 - 12 lead. Portsmouth were now in control with the opposition pack unable to compete with the Portsmouth pack and the backs were also showing real pace both on the wings and in the centre with the Gates/Hunter partnership showing great understanding. Such was the control being shown by the Portsmouth pack they were able to drive O.E's almost 30 metres towards the O.E's try line where eventually Finn Parry managed to get the ball down for a try. The conversion was successful and the score moved on to 26 - 12 with 23 minutes gone. This was the 4th and bonus point try. Portsmouth were dominating in all aspects of the game and were able to keep play well in the O.E's half. Following a kick ahead by O.E's Portsmouth were able to gather the ball at pace and set up yet another good attacking move which saw the ball moved across the 3's and then back inside until the ever present Fooks took the final pass from Curtis Barnes to score midway out. Morgan's kick was again successful and the lead extended to 33 - 12 on 29 minutes. Darren Crabb then came off to be replaced by Ian French who went into the second row. From a scrum to O.E's, Portsmouth were again able to drive them off the ball and a penalty against O.E's saw Portsmouth take another scrum. This saw the ball moved to Curtis Barnes who made good ground before the ball was passed to second row Daz Leggott who crashed over for Portsmouth's 6th try. Again Morgan was on target with the conversion and the lead now stood at 40 - 12 with about 5 minutes remaining.

Will Brock then had to leave the field to be replaced by Rhys Bowen. In the dying minutes O.E's were able to make a rare visit deep into the home sides 22 and eventually pressure saw them drive over for a consolation try which was converted making the final score Portsmouth 40 - Old Emanuel 19 as the final whistle went.

The Man of the Match award was presented to Portsmouth centre Jordan Hunter.

This was a very good result for the Portsmouth squad, to score 6 tries against the top side with only 1 in reply speaks well for the effort they all put in. This result sees O.E's cement their place as second in the table on 95 points, just 2 points ahead of Portsmouth on 93. Old Cranleighans take the top spot with a 24 - 51 win away to Old Tiffinians but they still have a game in hand against Warlingham which is being played next week. They are currently on 96 points. This has been a good season for the whole 1st.XV squad with no team winning against them twice. Including Cup matches they have scored a total of 993 points, just 7 short of the magic 1000, and that includes 2 cup

matches where we were awarded walk overs so no chance of scoring points. And a very satisfactory way for Ian French to end his playing days, and on Sunday he will be back at Rugby Camp supporting wife Pauline who props for the Valkyries, as they play their final league fixture against London Welsh in a battle for the top spot. Let's hope it's a good result to finish of the weekend.

Both Old Cranleighans and Old Emanuel have now gained promotion to London 2 South West and we wish them every success in that League.



Portsmouth Team=

French, Fooks, Wilkie.

Crabb (C), Leggott.

Easterbrook, Brock, Bowen.

Morgan, Chandler.

Simmons, Gates, Hunter, Farnes.

Barnes.

Replacements=

Parry, Hoolihan, Whitehouse.