

DEVON WOMEN 35 HAMPSHIRE WOMEN 5

Gill Burns County Championship Division 2 Pool 2

Match report by Richard V Isaacs

Hampshire Women's hopes of a three-peat in the Gill Burns County Championship Division 2 are hanging by a thread as they were well beaten by a strong Devon side at Okehampton on Sunday by 35 points to 5.

It was a chastening afternoon for the reigning Division 2 holders against the Division 3 winners from twelve months previous, who ran in five unanswered tries in the first half with the blustery conditions at their back and gave Hampshire too much to do to claw their way back into the contest in the second.

That was despite scoring an early try in the second half through Trojans scrum-half Hannah Kemish and putting the hosts on the back foot for much of the forty minutes but they weren't able to add to their tally.

The damage was done in the opening six minutes as the impressive Devon back-line ran the Hampshire defence ragged.

In the 3rd minute, left winger Charleigh Hopkin (Ivybridge) turned on the gas to outrun the visitors line on the outside and, just three minutes later, home player Issy Edworthy added a second, leaving Hampshire chasing shadows.

With the excellent Cullompton duo of centre Mollie Pepper and full-back Sammie Harris pulling the strings, they were leaving Hampshire's heads spinning as they released their pacy backs to scyth through the opposition.

Hampshire did finally put an attack into motion with some assured handling but were penalised for holding on and the danger cleared deep into the visitors territory. As they attempted to clear, the kick was charged down, not for the first time as Devon squeezed and harried, and second-row Kat Cramp (Bideford) was on hand to collect and charge over from close range.

The speed of the Devonian play was causing Hampshire all manner of problems and it was causing a number of knock-ons and hurried kicking which presented the ball back to the home side and they took full advantage on the half-hour mark when scrum-half Michaela Dorrian (Ivybridge) dummied from the back of a scrum, leaving Hampshire flat-footed and sauntered across the line for the bonus point score.

Captain and prop Jess Thomas added Devon's fifth of the afternoon, which seemed to come from nowhere and with centre Beth Plumpton hitting all five conversions, it gave the hosts a comfortable 35-0 lead at the break and Hampshire plenty to consider.

With some choice words still ringing in their ears, Hampshire set about the repair job and, when Devon were penalised for pulling the scrum down in midfield, a quickly taken penalty allowed the ball to be spread into midfield and Kemish powered her way to the line to cut the arrears.

But, despite using the conditions well to peg Devon back into their own half with some impressive kicking from Rose Brown, Hampshire couldn't find the key to unlock the home side again.

They were not helped by twice knocking on with the try line at their mercy and the well disciplined defence from the hosts which also rubbed off on the visitors too as they shut them out for the full half to win the half 5-0.

However, in realism, this was one of the poorest displays from Hampshire Women for a number of years and leaves them with a trip to Gloucestershire next Sunday hoping for a best runners-up spot at least or a Cornwall victory over their near neighbours to open the table up but this result was definitely not one on the cards.