

KENT 42 HAMPSHIRE 5

Match report by Richard V Isaacs

Hampshire commenced their Bill Beaumont County Championship Division 1 campaign with defeat at holders Kent but they didn't go down meekly despite the harshness of the scoreline.

The home side scored six tries, all of which were converted by Tonbridge Juddians centre Sam Evans, but were forced on the back foot for much of the final quarter as Hampshire battered the Kent line and finally broke through in the last minute.

However, the damage was done early on and the four try bonus point collected as early as the 36th minute as the highly skilled Kent side, made up of players with vast National League experienced clubs like Dorking, Juddians, Westcombe Park, Esher and Blackheath, showed why they were the Championship winners at Twickenham last year.

Winger Tom Kendrick opened the scoring on just four minutes when he flew around the outside of the Hampshire defence to dot down and flanker Vince Everitt charged through before the quarter mark to add their second.

Scrum-half Mikel Davies made no mistake on the half hour when he crossed for their third of the afternoon and added a second in similar fashion just six minutes later to give the hosts a 28-0 advantage at the break, although they did lose winger Kwaku Asiedu to a nasty leg injury.

Take nothing away from the visitors though, who battled hard and could have been rewarded for their efforts if their handling had been more assured, all too readily handing the ball back to their hosts following knock-ons when in good positions.

Kent added two more tries to their tally within 11 minutes of the restart, the second giving Kendrick his second, opening up a 42-0 lead with time to add.

But Hampshire more than troubled the home side and banged the door down in the final 20 minutes, spending much of the period camped in the Kent 22 but stubborn and well disciplined defence kept them at bay. They did suffer a yellow card when Everitt was sent to the sinbin and Hampshire used their advantage well.

Jack Phillips did cross wide out, only for it to be called back for a forward pass but they were not to be denied in the 80th minute when Havant's Wes Dugan received Ben Griffin's pass on the inside and the veteran flanker carved his way over for a deserved consolation. Tom Fieldsend's conversion smacked the upright and the game closed with Kent winning 42-5 but certainly plenty of encouragement for Hampshire's final group game fixture against Cornwall at Havant on Saturday 30th May.