

## **Under-17 Bowl Final**

**Enniskillen – 11, Randalstown – 10**

Enniskillen snatched victory in the final at a sunny Stevenson Park, Dungannon, by the narrowest of margins and with a performance that fell well short of their two previous matches. Despite losing their Player of the Year, Dale “Pinnocchio” Johnston and Most Improved Player of the Year James “Evil Knievel” Fawcett, in the week preceding the game the team showed great spirit and determination to get the job done.

From a 'Skins viewpoint the game couldn't have got off to a worse start when possession was conceded from the opening kick-off and within seconds Randalstown had scored an unconverted try, the result of some awful tackling.

Sean Michael Breen then got 'Skins on the board when he converted his second of three penalty attempts after ten minutes.

The game was finely balanced with mistakes from both sides stopping the flow of the game, and the writing looked on the wall for Enniskillen after twenty-five minutes when Randalstown got their second try, and like the first 'Skins were the architects of their own failings with some poor attempts at tackling.

The half had another twist when 'Skins then spent the closing minutes in Randalstown territory and after a series of penalties managed to get the ball wide to Dennis Green who squeezed over in the corner to reduce the arrears to 10 – 8.

The second half was a scrappy affair with the referee having to talk to players too often for infringements, particularly at the breakdown. For their part 'Skins were guilty of some poor decision making, often trying too hard to make something happen when a simpler option would have sufficed, especially given that the 'Skins lineout, mainly through Stuart Phair, dominated the game and it was only with some trick ploys that Randalstown managed to get any ball from the set-piece. Fergal Lynam and his flankers, Andy McCrae and Ryan Sandford, caused many problems at the base of the scrums as the forwards started to take some measure of control.

'Skins managed to get their noses in front for the first time after fifteen minutes of the second period. Indiscipline from Randalstown, having conceded an extra ten metres at a penalty, set up Breen with what looked a formality, but his kick rebounded off the post and via Randalstown hands back to Breen who coolly dropped a goal for the 11– 10 winning score.

The game was as even as the scoreline suggested but could have got worse for 'Skins as Simon McLaughlin was yellow carded on twenty-two minutes, a rather harsh decision by the referee for a technical infringement, especially as Randalstown were lucky to have fifteen men on the field when a dangerous late, and illegal, spear-tackle went unpunished despite the referee having spoken to the player involved.

As players tired Randalstown managed to finish the game on top, when a loose kick gave them possession inside 'Skins “22”. The goal-line defence was firm and so was the discipline not to concede any penalties, and when Randalstown lost possession into touch the game was over. Cue jubilant scenes for 'Skins and utter dismay for Randalstown.

Despite the jubilation the Ulster Branch managed to disappoint those from Enniskillen by not even having a trophy to present to the winning team, reportedly all down to the search for a sponsor!