

The Magnificent Seven....teen

Enniskillen Under-19 – 11

Rainey Under-19 – 0

A generous and thoughtful invitation from the 1st XV team and management staff saw the Enniskillen under 19 squad add their dulcet tones to the joint post match dressing room celebrations and singing on Saturday afternoon, and well deserved it was too for both sides. The 19s should have felt quite at home sitting amongst their older counterparts after having played one of their best games of the season to date that showed great determination, patience and maturity in their play to beat Rainey under 19s by 11 points without reply.

The dark gray autumn afternoon had threatened more rain all during the match which thankfully never came, however the mornings heavy showers had left the pitches soft, slippery and heavy underfoot. These conditions would normally have stymied any open running play or good handling but contrary to all the expectations of those watching (the coach in particular), there was as much work from the backs as there was grunt from the forwards. Several players had cried off before Saturday and this meant a major reshuffle in position for some players, in particular, John Maguire, Ryan McNulty and Ryan Sandford.

Taking the muddy conditions high winds and threatening rain into consideration the game plan had been that of many in the past, forwards keep it in close and tight and work their way up the pitch and half backs control release depending on opportunities available once within striking range of the opposition try line, simples! The forwards duly obliged and slowly and methodically worked their way upfield on several occasions eventually being rewarded with a penalty. Unfortunately but not surprisingly this was missed as gusting winds pushed the ball just wide of the post. Again the forwards took possession and looked to battle their way forward, support was good with Aaron Love and Lewis McCrabbe making battering ram runs at the opposition. With the ever sharp McCaffrey between these two and the titans Sheridan and Sandford behind that it was going to be a tough shift at the coalface for Rainey. After several bouts of indiscipline from Rainey, Enniskillen came away 3 points richer from the boot of young Maguire following a penalty.

Calm decision making throughout the team aided by superb kicking by Fearghal Lynam and especially John Maguire in very difficult conditions gave the team bags of confidence. The back row of Flanagan, Fawcett and McKenzie if not soaring high in the lineout like young eagles to steal as much opposition ball as their own, they were hunting down and harrying the opposition like regal wolfhounds. McKenzie also joined in attacks by the back line to great effect with Barrett and Wilson all trying to punch holes in the Rainey defence with handling practically flawless throughout. Outside that the fleetfooted greyhounds, Daley and Whitbread and later Moffitt and Arnold were unlucky not to pick up any scores on the several scraps that came their way. On several occasions the chase given by the wings and centres paid off handsomely in territory and possession.

Behind this was the redoubtable Ryan McNulty, who at one point executed a sublime piece of skill in chipping a stationary ball into his hands while running at full pace with two opposition players bearing down on him! Secure on any high ball or grubbers that came through from Rainey his self assured style gave his team mates even more encouragement.

Only once did Rainey press the Enniskillen line and the Enniskillen defence proved as formidable as its attack. Time and again Rainey pounded the line only to be repelled by stubborn and determined Enniskillen scrummaging or rucking. Relief came when the referee awarded Enniskillen a scrum and Maguire, making full use of the cross wind, gained good distance in the touch kick.

The second half saw Enniskillen take the dominant role again. Constant pressure, intelligent play

some excellent kicking and back row/back line running saw McKenzie, leading by example, break the Rainey line for a superb try. The conversion was narrowly missed. Rainey, at this point were by no means out of the game but starved of much possession, made little by the way of reply and frustrated at this their indiscipline was to cost them dearly on several occasions when too much backchat to the referee took Enniskillen 20 metres deeper into Rainey territory. The home side were once again rewarded for their efforts when opposition discipline gave way and Maguire punished them with a confident penalty kick into a strengthening breeze. The final whistle several minutes later came as a welcome relief more for the Rainey players as the Enniskillen players were dominating nearly every facet of play and relishing the experience!

One aspect that delighted coach and players alike was the intensity level of Enniskillens play. There was no noticeable dip in performance or attitude throughout. Play may not have been as fast and furious as some previous matches but a consistent level of play and pressure was maintained without any slide into bouts of “panic play” until the final whistle. Enniskillen played as a team with forwards and backs linking well through a composed and confident set of half backs. Handling was excellent given the prevailing weather conditions with every one of the seventeen players who played showing style guts and determination. Magnificent! Well done lads!