

A Great Performance

Enniskillen Under 19 – 17 Sligo Under 19 – 14

It's often said that when a team is down one man the effort is turned up to the extent that they play as if they had one man extra on the pitch and that theory was well and truly put to the test on Saturday when Enniskillen under 19s took on Sligo under 19s in a pre Christmas friendly at Mullaghmeen.

Sligo arrived with their full complement of players and in good time, however Enniskillen had once more been let down by quite a few of their regular players so it was with some relief that fifteen bodies adorned in the Enniskillen colours eventually took to the pitch. Both sides realised prior to kick off that conditions were far from ideal. A heavy sodden pitch, bitterly cold temperatures and a biting wind looked to have ruled out any chance of exhibition youth rugby and increased the risk of player injury, a worrying point in Enniskillen's case.

Opening play was a stuttering affair with both sides making tentative, probing incursions into each other's halves. Sligo dominated the scrums, usually driving Enniskillen back the permitted one and a half metres but with such soft ground underfoot Enniskillens forwards could do little to prevent this. The home side was however securing nearly all of their own ball and those stalwarts of the front row, Love, McCaffrey and McCrabbe must be paid credit for that. It wasn't such a happy time for Sligo in the lineout where, although not reigning supreme, Gormley and Flanagan were literally head and shoulders above the opposition and making the most of it with McCaffrey's throwing on target nearly every time. Some cracks in Enniskillen's play became evident when Sligo players ran seemingly unchallenged to near the home side's 22 metre line. Enniskillen were on the back foot and trying to regroup when eventually Sligo pressed home their advantage and went over for a converted try.

In the second half Enniskillen rallied and several times patiently worked their way down into the Sligo "22", eventually capitalising on their hard work, when after several phases of open play, Gormley crashed through and stretched out just far enough to make the Sligo goal line. Unfortunately the two point trimmings weren't added.

An experimental reshuffling of full back and out half at half time had worked quite well up until both were sent off for some hot headed play that must have had Sligo players and coaches rubbing their hands and having a crafty snigger. Inevitably Sligo made good use of the numerical advantage and drove downfield again to bag seven points.

In the last 12 minutes of play, Enniskillen's play was inspired, whether divine or that found when looking down the barrel of the proverbial gun, the thirteen players to a man battered their way into Sligo's left wing. Led by those Minotaurs of the pack, Love, McCrabbe and Sandford, the rest came on like ravenous hunters, remorseless in their hunt of the ball. Moffitt, once within striking distance of the Sligo line, decided time was of the essence and crashed through and over for an unconverted score from a short distance out.

With now only 7 minutes left Enniskillens two repentants were allowed to climb off the "naughty step" and come back into the game. Back to a full fifteen Enniskillen really upped the tempo and fought for every scrap. Barrett, McNulty and Daley were superb in the chase of some of Lynams brilliant box kicks and in the forwards Arnold, in particular, was having an outstanding performance, his tackling and turnover ball rate showing the way with Flanagan, McCaffrey and Gormley following close behind.

But the cherry on the cake came when the two “naughty boys”, Breen and Maguire conspired to make amends and break Sligo hearts. A brilliantly weighted chip over the Sligo defensive line into the in-goal area by Maguire was pounced on by Breen whose quick action had beaten the forlorn hope that was Sligos rearguard. To add to Sligos chagrin the conversion was good.

Whoever said, “Its not the dog in the fight, it’s the fight in the dog!” never spoke a truer word and these fifteen Enniskillen players proved that to themselves in a big way against Sligo who currently top their league.

Credit should go to the players that did turn out, and for the odd guest player, and as that famous Bard put it, “Those that lay abed on Saturday morning must feel themselves accursed”, (and yes honestly, he played rugby as well! Really!). So for that band of brothers, those happy few (15), well done guys, it was a brilliant performance!!!