

The Last Dance



Angus Cowan, our star sports reporter, watches a tough swansong for the injury depleted Eagles. Pictures by Arthur Ensor.

Hurst First XV arrived at Epsom College in good spirits ahead of the difficult game, with many boys looking forward to what would sadly be their last outing for the college. Mr Taggart, coach of the first team, was cautiously optimistic: 'On their day, if they all work hard for each other, they can get the performance they deserve. Of course, Epsom are going to be strong, but we will be just as up for it and hopefully our boys can match them physically, and ultimately let the rugby do the talking.'

Would the emotions help channel their performance? 'I think it's the last game of the season so there is a bit more emotion than usual, obviously it's a special occasion for some of the players it will be their last opportunity to run out in a fifteen's jersey. Hopefully they won't get too emotional but hopefully it brings out the best in themselves and the team as well.'

Ollie Anderson, whose played for the Eagles since he joined Hurst in year seven, told us this on his thoughts pre-game: 'The boys are certainly in good spirits today, they want to win this one, of course Epsom are very good, they pushed Cranleigh to the limits earlier in the season so it will be a tough game. If we keep our focus, and we stick to the process of how we play, then we will give them a game.'

The game certainly started off high tempo, with Hurst being able to push back the Epsom attack well in the first ten minutes. Epsom certainly wanted to give us a game however, and the crowd surrounding the pitch wanted to make their voices known to the Hurst players; but the boys were unfazed by the Epsom chants and put in some great knocks and good forward plays to show Epsom that they hadn't come without a fight.

Throughout the early stages of the game, neither team were able to have a longer spell of possession, and the play was becoming quite cagey. However, a good line break from one of the Epsom forwards managed to penetrate the well organised Hurst defence, and Epsom continued to pile pressure on until it was 5-0, the Hurst defence finally beaten.

Epsom then made it 10-0, drawing in the Hurst defence with some big forward play, before spinning it out wide. Hurst unable to stem the link up between the outside centre and the winger. Epsom enjoyed a spell of possession using their strong forward pack and smart counter-rucking to keep hold of the ball before recycling

it out to the backs, from which most of the attacks came from. Hurst's defence was really being tested against a very attacking team. They would really need to rally back from the position they were in.

At half time it was 20-0 Epsom, who had dictated the tempo thus far, however Hurst had some real standout performances from forwards like Arthur Kempson and Jonty Pearson. Hurst were certainly looking forward to a second half with the wind behind them and playing downhill into the Epsom defence, giving them the attacking advantage.

Hurst finally started to show their stripes, making it 20-5 through Ned Taggart. After a few hard-worked phases to help move down the pitch, Luca Richmond made the breakthrough with a brilliant hand-off to smash past the Epsom defence. Hurst then played an offensive siege on the Epsom try-line, before shipping it out to where Ned was able to put the ball over the line to give Hurst a way back into the game.

Hurst were certainly looking to take the game to Epsom, with the home crowd silenced and the momentum behind them. Hurst were stringing together some lovely forward pods and holding strong in the rucks against the Epsom forwards. However, Hurst were unlucky to not capitalise on this strong momentum, and Epsom took this chance to put some plays of their own together. They were able to regain some control within the match, spreading it out wide and using some fast hands and tip options to cut through our defence once again, making it 25-5.

Epsom then extended their lead to 30-5, with a well picked-out crossfield kick from the fly half which found the winger on the opposite side, and he comfortably placed the ball over the Hurst try line to reinforce victory. Even against the wind Epsom were enjoying more possession and control, despite Hurst's early spell of momentum at the beginning of the second half.

Hurst seemed to come alive, though, and the emotion of playing their last game seemed to be inspiring the older players. However, they suffered even more injuries as the second half continued and as fatigue began to settle into both sides, it became increasingly unlikely that Hurst would find a way back into the game. The game ended soon after, the final score being 52-5 with conversions.

It was very unlucky for Hurst, as they have struggled throughout the season due to a horrific injury crisis, and sad as it was a disappointing send off for some of the U6th players, who won't play in an Eagles shirt again and would certainly hope to have said goodbye in style. Hurst never gave up, however, and certainly gave Epsom a fight that shows their grit and determination to achieve the very best from any situation.

