

Cannock 10 - Barton 10 - 8th May 2011

We won today. It was a proper pain to watch and to play. Steve Dixon said if I had written this ahead of time that even my ridiculous story lines would have been rejected by the editors as "Ludicrous".



Summary :

- Cannock did not dominate up front.
- Cannock blitzed in defence and snuffed out our backs and key ball carriers.
- Cannock were 10-0 up at half time.



- Barton came back.
- Barton scored two tries through both wingers (Bloxxham and Woolston) finishing off fine moves
- Barton remained calm and composed and ended the 80 minutes 10-10.



- Extra time was played,
- Extra pressure was added to the circulatory systems of players and spectators alike.
- Extraordinary circumstances prevailed
- No extra points from either side.



- It was still 10-10
- It was sudden death penalties.
- It was Matt Bird who slotted 4
- It was Cannock who slotted 3.
- It was Barton with their hands on the Cup.

A finer spectacle could not have been designed, and the relief, euphoria, Jubilation, rapture, elation, ecstasy, and joy, were apparent to everyone with red and white blood cells running through their veins.

Good luck to all who have to work tomorrow (who set this up for a Sunday ????) and now we have the “Hotter than Mustard” Tour to look forward to.

Essington 12 - Barton 47 - 23rd April 2011

Here is the Churchill guide to our first try. Note that during all four photos where our Number 8 has picked and gone, that the Essington 8 is still bound to the scrum..

Will Matt Cox break this tackle ? Oh Yes.



Will Pow Pow come to his aid ? Oh Yes.



Will he make the line ? Oh Yes.



Score ? Oh Yes.



Will we win ? Silly question.

Better is such a great word. It can appear in Adjective, Noun or Verb form, it can motivate, demoralise and define all at the same time. It can prompt a young engineer to set a career path ("Better sort yourself out"), it can categorise a potential tourist's gambling problem ("He's the Better in the team"), and it can describe how every opposing side has viewed Barton. "Better". Yes.

















I was berated by the local Essington fans for not bringing along a hip flask (I didn't realise it was such a big part of our previous visits !) but at 25 degrees it wasn't whisky weather at all. It was hot and the team talk was to play the game at our pace. The front row of Huddy, Brooksey and Robinson looked good and were better than the opposition and it's not often we've been able to say that about the Essington pack. The first score was to come from Matt Cox who decided to play at 8 today although he managed to throw in at the lineout too; not straight but at least he threw. He picked and went from a 5 yard scrum and Jamie converted.



Not long after when we had a lineout in their 22, Matt threw in well but Lee Coton fumbled the pass off his left hand and caused Jamie to stumble and pause, which was just long enough for the Essington backs to come up to the gain line. Jamie saw a little gap inside, stepped and popped a lovely ball to a thundering Murphy who came into the line from full back and scored under the posts. Less than a quarter of an hour gone and we were 14-0 up.





Within ten minutes we were pushing, rucking, recycling, working the phases and eventually we saw Cox again with the ball on a loop round the backs. He passed nicely to Jimmy Gardner (who started on the wing ! ? !) who's bullocking run soaked up all available defenders, and from the ruck Jamie quickly darted over for a score which he duly converted. The pressure continued and from a Birdy kick ahead the Essington blindside winger kicked the ball dead. This time it was scrum half Lee who picked up from the 5 yard scrum and scored and we were up 28-0.





Then it rained. I wasn't ready for this wearing only shorts, flip flops and a stupid grin, but it was clear that the slippery conditions didn't suit us either. Pow Pow struggled under the many kick-offs that were made with a slippery ball and had to leave the field when his kneecap decided to slip sideways. On came Jody and a wholesale change of positions took place. During this state of flux Essington scored from a 5 yard penalty which was popped to their rollicking Captain who had started his run several minutes earlier from the half way line. We didn't stop him, they converted and the half ended (as did the rain).



Bugger me if the ref didn't start the second half while I was away getting a beer ! Apparently there was a catch and drive from a lineout and the score was 28-12. Essington were getting a bit of confidence back and I realised how dangerous they can be when motivated. It took a while for us to gain composure but then came the best try I've seen Barton score in years. A perfectly straight throw into the lineout from Giles (who had

come on for Brookesey), off the top from the ever impressive James Thorpe to Lee Coton to spin a lovely flat ball out to Jamie. Quick pass to Bloxham at inside centre (I did say it was an unusual team !). Blokker feinted inside to take the gap between the two centres, then resumed his crossfield run until the Essington outside centre (their best player) scragged him, but Birdy was on hand. For years we had told Birdy not to drift, to run straight and stop the defence. He did and cut a boootiful line out to in and ran against the defensive flow and the flatfooted full back to score under the posts. "Like that Gareth ? " Birdy piped up. "Yes, son" I said. Jamie converted.





Ten minutes later we had a five yard scrum and with Lee off and John Hutchison on, Matt Cox moved to scrum half and dotted down when the scrum was pushed over the line and Dave Rowe graciously left the ball for Matt to score with. Jamie missed the conversion. Disgraceful !

So Jamie had a good day with the boot, kicking conversions from both sides of the pitch, and as I marveled at how close J was to my perfect kicking style (stop laughing Skehan !) Steve Dixon piped up telling me a very, very tall tale about how he used his knowledge as a golf pro to adjust Jamie's kicking stance as he would a golfer preparing to swing. It works, and the confidence ripples through the team.

The final phase of the match was a glorious summary of the Barton season. Blokkio tackled with a vengeance, bounced to his feet and ripped the ball and spun it out. Rowie popped up in the backs and thinking he naturally wears two digits on his shirt, kicked (I said it was typical of our season). Murphy blitzed onto the ball and as he gathered, was snaffled but had a rampaging Jimmy G on his shoulder who gratefully collected the pass and dotted down to score.



What a way to end our league campaign – the highs and lows (or lows then highs). The Blue & white strip is not my favourite but if it makes the team play better, then it's good enough for me.

We drank more beer, filled Danny Carlin with dread about what was going to happen to him on tour, and all in all had a great day, and felt it couldn't get any better.....but wait ! Pub Rolf took off, and Barton has never seen so many large sets of spectacles and scared kangaroos since Deidre Barlow went out back.

Now where are my Owen cup final tickets ??

Warley 6 - Barton 43 - 9th April 2011

The sun was out, my Veteran buddies were in Barcelona for the Perpignan / Toulon game, I was jealous and with Bird and Cox in the starting line up the writing was on the wall at Warley and we just hoped neither of them would get tired or exhausted.



As the team warmed up Birdy aggravated an already swollen ankle and had to sit out the game without a chance of getting tired or exhausted. Great start! With several players already missing we only had Huddy and Kev benching. The team lined up as follows;

Brookes – Hadfield – Robinson – Rowe – Palin – Milnes – Thorpe – Simons – Coton – Maxwell – Carvell – Cox – Bloxham – Johnson – S Murphy

So we started with seven changes from the team that beat Market Drayton and from the Warley kick off Giles jumped to take the ball only for him to take a nasty (accidental) knock to the eye from the Warley lock. Dazed and as always, 'confused' he knocked on and then soldiered on at hooker.

From the scrum Lee Coton at scrum half showed what was to come as he snagged the Warley 8 as he picked from the base. This led to a knock on and a series of scrappy play and scrums. It was Simons turn to pick from the base and feed Jamie who cleared up the left wing. Charlie gave chase supported by Murph who blocked the Warley clearance resulting in a lineout on the 5 metre line. The Warley scrum half looked sharp and was showing early signs of quality and maturity for such young years. His box kick put Warley back in the Barton 22 and so it went with Barton playing up the slope and Warley using the slope to gain territorial advantage.

The Warley pack were, well, let's say mature and played the game at their pace slowing down both play and breakdown. The referee gave a penalty against them for holding on 40 metres out. Jamie kicked but pulled it wide of the left hand upright. From the drop out Barton worked the ball back and Warley gave away another penalty on the half way line. Jamie took a quick tap and the ball went through the hands for the first time for Matt Cox to score under the posts. Jamie converted and it was Warley 0 Barton 7.

Warley had been strong in the scrum with their weight and slope advantage but had threatened little. Barton were defending well and young Milnes was showing signs of a promising performance. He made a good tackle but was pulled up for handling in the ruck and the Warley scrum half punished us to make the score Warley 3 Barton 7.

The game continued in a similar vein with Barton trying to keep the ball alive, lots of scrums, that Lee negated when it was Warley's and the slope and weight advantage negated when it was ours. Warley gave away a series of penalties but we couldn't take advantage. Then Simons picked from the base of the scrum and took the ball on, Lee Coton supported and took the ball from Simons and went into contact to set up the ruck, the ball went wide and Warley managed to use the touchline as the extra defender as Charlie was forced into touch.

From the lineout Simons went through to spoil and the clearance was mis-kicked. Warley were offside, Jamie took a quick tap and Cox took the ball on, Jamie supported and when Cox was tackled he popped to Jamie to score. The conversion hit the post and it was Warley 3 Barton 12.

Barton were starting to impose themselves on the game now and Big Dave Palin was seeing a lot of ball and carrying over the gain line each time. He broke the line, fed Thorpey who fed Rowe to place an incisive grubber kick from which a score looked inevitable. The Warley scrum half had different ideas and made a fantastic interception, fed the fullback and Warley cleared.

Barton then gave away another penalty and the score was suddenly Warley 6 Barton 12.

Thorpey caught the restart and took the ball into contact to set up the ruck, Simons took the ball on and fed Lee who is as dangerous as anyone in the league in open play. Lee sidestepped his way from the halfway line to score under the posts, Jamie converted and the score was Warley 6 Barton 19.

Half Time – Warley 6 Barton 19

The first half had been a scrappy affair with Warley keeping it tight and Barton not being able to get the ball wide often enough. Our back 3 had seen little of the ball and on most occasions we had played well as individuals but not as well as we can as a team. The half time talk highlighted this and with the slope advantage the second half was to be a different story, or so we hoped.

Barton started to get on top early and the ever improving Adam Brookes along with Tom Robinson and Giles Hadfield started to impose themselves at the scrum and in the maul. Barton started well. Jamie put the ball deep into the corners to set up attacks and from a 5 metre lineout Barton mauled the ball over the try line but were held up. From the next lineout Barton went with 4 in then line, secured good ball and put in Dave Palin to crash through the defence and take the ball on. When tackled he popped to Jonny Simons who attempted the 'Gayest Swan Dive' ever seen on a rugby field and score under the posts. RAVING POOFER !!!! Jamie converted, Warley 6 Barton 26.

Huddy replaced Giles who was still dazed and as always, 'confused'.

Warley then showed that they weren't all brawn as a good move gave their impressive centre space and as he went in to score under the posts Murph ankle tapped him and he dropped the ball, pulled his hamstring and was later to be awarded 'Dick Head of the Day' by his team mates. Bless !

It was all Barton now but we were still not showing the signs we all wanted to see until we won a scrum against the head 10 metres out. Finally the ball went through all the hands and Matt Bloxham straightened his running line before putting Jodie Carvell in to score in the corner. Jamie missed and it was Warley 6 Barton 31.

Matt Bloxham and Jon Milnes started to show great running lines and after a series of pick and go's Cox fed Lee who took it on again and taking out the cover defence in contact and popping to Dave Palin to score. The kick was missed – Warley 6 Barton 36.

Jonny Simons picked from the base of the scrum again and took the ball on well to be tackled 25 metres out but he managed to feed Lee who again showed his class to score. Jamie converted and Barton had won the game.

Final Score – Warley 6 Barton 43

Man of Match - Lee Coton

This was Barton's 5th win on the bounce and they are learning to defend a lead and finally finish off opponents. The best thing about today's victory was the fact that we achieved it with seven changes to the team. The Club is creating a good mix of experience and youth, which is providing a good foundation to build on. However, there is a but, and the word is 'selflessness', without a doubt we need to learn to show more of it and then we can achieve great things.

One final word – 'Roomy' – look at her bum !!



Barton 45 - Market Drayton 0 - 26th March 2011

The mention of Market Drayton brings 3 things to mind.

- Jules Bitter, very nice pale ale that went down very well on draught at the Club recently.
- The Kings Head, a friendly market town pub that Market Drayton uses as their base.
- And, for some obscure reason, Drayton Manor Park, which is nowhere near Market Drayton but boasts of 'Amazing Attractions', 'Thrill Rides', 'A Zoo', 'Thomas Land', 'Schools' and 'Hospitality',

We have always enjoyed competitive hard fought games against each other and it is good to see today's opponents competing very well in the league following promotion last season. Barton managed to win the away fixture, which was fortunate to take place amidst the winter freeze and for some reason the journey there didn't seem quite as onerous as in previous years. Maybe this is because Clee Hill and Cleobury Mortimer pale it into insignificance.

Last week Market Drayton had travelled to Cannock and lost 15 – 12 with the match report stating that it was a good hard fought win and that MD started very physically. Was this a sign of things to come today? We would have to wait and see!

Barton had won 4 of the previous 5 games coming into this match and were again able to field a consistent starting XV with the exception of Thorpedo, who has started his X Factor Tour. Matt Bloxham filled in at openside and the bench consisted of Giles Hadfield, Sleek and Jonny 'Glassback' Simons.

Market Drayton kicked off and their 7 made good ground to leap and knock the ball backwards to retain possession. MD started well, keeping the ball tight and gaining the hard yards round the fringes in a very physical opening to the game. I now understood how accurate the Cannock match report had been.

Barton though, have had to learn to be masters in defence, breakdown and physicality. Their forwards may not be the biggest in this league but there are none fitter and they tackle and compete at the breakdown like no other team. MD became frustrated quickly as Lee Coton, Matt Bloxham, Matt Cox and Huddy won turnover after turnover.

Lee Coton, who was back to his best in midfield following a slight head cold, tackled his man, got to his feet to win the ball and won a penalty given for holding on. Up stepped Birdy and Barton worked one of their many penalty moves, which they have been perfecting in training. He aimed for the right hand post with his kick, hit the target and Ben Murphy followed up to claim the ball and score. The MD loose head barked his dismay at his team like a Sergeant Major whilst watching Birdy sail the conversion through the posts.

Stuart 'Statto' Cox assured me that 7 minutes and 32 seconds had been played and it was Barton 7 Market Drayton 0.

MD came back at Barton with the same tactics, hard yards from a hard working pack and then spreading the ball to try and penetrate the Barton backs. Huddy tackled his man, went to win the ball and again won a penalty for holding on. His work in the loose was inspiring everyone to up their game. Jamie Maxwell was already at the top of his game both in defence and with his cultured boot. He put the kick deep into the MD 22 but not straight was given in the lineout.

Market Drayton had a slight edge in the early scrums but the Barton back row of Cox, Bloxham and Sarah Palin were in inspired form. From the ensuing scrum, MD won clean ball only for Blocko to tie them up at the back and win another penalty for holding on. Birdy kicked, Statto said 14 minutes were on the clock and it was Barton 10 Market Drayton 0.

Market Drayton came back again with surge after surge and Barton kept up the strong defence winning ball at the breakdown. Jamie kept them pinned back and their frustrations started to erupt into verbal and physical confrontation. Both sides fronted up on a couple of occasions, but these teams are both hard but fair rugby playing teams. The MD 12 was warned by the referee for opening his mouth and conceded 10 metres at the penalty.

Barton had defended for 20 minutes without looking like conceding. From another turnover they worked the ball up field where Quidditch, who had played like a 4th back row forward in defence, took the ball on and off loaded perfectly only to be greeted by the shoulder of the MD loose head who was showing that he could not only talk the talk, but also walk the walk. Quidditch had to leave the field with suspected broken ribs in his back, which later turned out to be muscle spasms.

After 10 minutes of good possession and the signs of getting on top, Barton had to rearrange their formation. Rocky moved from wing to scrum half and Sleek came on to the wing from the bench. If the opposing winger was relieved to see the back of Rocky he didn't know what was coming his way with Sleek.

Market Drayton took advantage of the period following and put Barton under intense pressure. The MD Coach told me that their loose head had scored 17 tries in 17 games this season and it became clear that their tactic was to secure lineout ball and use their strong mauling tactic to try and score. Barton defended superbly and held out for ten minutes on their line. The MD 12 gave away a penalty for use of the boot, opened his mouth, saw yellow and gave away ten metres. Jamie put Barton back into the MD 22, Blocko took the ball on, popped the ball left to Bisex who grubbered through to pounce on the ball but it had gone dead

The referee blew for half time.

The Sergeant Major bellowed his tactics to his Market Drayton troops.

'Their work rate is sh*t, their skill levels are sh*t, their scrum is sh*t, their lineout is sh*t, their backs only have a sh*t crash ball move and they only scored because of a sh*t penalty kick. All we need to do is keep doing what we are doing and we will murder them'.

Oeeeeerrrrrr Misssuuuusssss !!!!!

I was always taught that numbers never lie !!!!!

Half Time – Barton 10 Market Drayton 0

The second half started and MD worked the ball back at Barton with the same tight game tactics. They used the following wind to gain territory with the boot and pin Barton back but with Sam and Ben Murphy at their consistent best they ran back ball after ball.

An errant MD kick led to one of the tries of the season. Sam Murphy took the kick and jinked his way up field from 10 metres out. He off loaded to Lee Coton who took the contact. Rocky fed Jamie from the ruck who put in Bisex to take it on and pop it to Coxy who took out two players to put Sarah Palin in 15 metres out. Like a scene from the football match in 'Bedknobs and Broomsticks', Sarah trampled over the poor lad at fullback like a Rhino and scored under the posts. Birdy kicked, Statto said 12 minutes were on the clock in the second half and it was Barton 17 Market Drayton 0.

Shortly after this there were two worrying injuries for MD. Their excellent number 7 walked off holding his arm. I asked if he was ok to which he replied 'it's broken, where's the hospital', no moaning, no groaning just practicality.....!!!! It turns out he had a dislocated shoulder, broken collar bone and broken arm (everyone from Barton wishes you luck and looks forward to seeing you playing again). The number 3 then came off concussed, he is a big strong lad and I didn't want him to fall on me so I was pleased when their Physio asked him to sit down. The pitch was rock hard and taking its toll on the players and it was Market Drayton's turn to reshuffle.

In their previous four victories Barton had made too many unforced basic errors to give away points and possession. We knew that if they could cut these out and hold out with a strong defence that someone was going to see the best of us. Market Drayton had competed well at the lineout and scrum all day but were beginning to tire. Adam Brookes at 20 years of age is improving at a rate of knots at prop and today he gave his oppo a torrid time. With the experienced Tom Robinson as the other prop Barton started to dominate the scrum and gained more and more possession. This resulted in half an hour of free flowing rugby worthy of a higher standard.

Barton won a penalty 10 metres out, played a dummy switch to take the ball back into the forwards and when Rocky passed to Jamie he had options outside but his experience enabled him to dummy and see the gap to go in under the posts. Birdy kicked, Statto stated 15 minutes were on the clock and with 25 minutes remaining it was Barton 24 Market Drayton 0.

Glassback replaced Sarah at No 8 and from the restart he took the ball on for 40 metres handing off several players before putting in Coxy who took the contact just inside the MD 22. Rocky passed back to Jamie whose attempted drop goal went wide.

From the drop out Sam Murphy took the ball up the left wing and put an exquisite kick back into the MD 22 for a lineout on the 5 metre line. Not 5 was given by the referee and Dave Rowe, who had been excellent all day, was unlucky as he looked to score in the corner.

Barton came at MD with wave after wave of attacks when Lee Coton took the ball from his 22 with 3 players outside him in support. He drifted play across towards the left wing before changing his angle and cutting back inside his man to out pace the cover defence and score under the posts for an exquisite individual try. Birdy converted, Statto stated that 21 minutes had gone and with 19 minutes left it was Barton 31 Market Drayton 0.

Two things then happened. Sarah Palin tried to blackmail me into writing about his try and Swiss Tony Skehan tried an under hand tactic by stamping on the opposition's water bottles, but managed to keep his feet. In my book, both heinous crimes deserving of some ridiculing retribution....Jimmy G, I will leave it with you!!!!

Tom came off with a bloody nose and Giles went on then Huddy came off and Giles stayed on and went to hooker. Barton became dominant in every area and started to win ball against the head at the scrum. 5 metres out they sucked in the defence, the ball went through to Bisex who ran it back into the forwards, the play was set and the Crusaders looked like scoring. Then, Rowe dragged Rocky out of his way at scrum half, popped it blind to MBUK (the crowd howled with derision) who gave the deftest of blind pop passes out for Cox to run it in on the wing. Birdy converted from the touchline, Statto stated that 34 minutes had passed and it was Barton 38 Market Drayton 0 with 6 minutes remaining.

At the death Barton won another scrum against the head in the MD 22 and Ben Murphy was put in for his second try to cap an outstanding performance on his part. Birdy kicked to make it Barton 45 Market Drayton 0 and maintain an 87.5% kicking game, then the referee blew for full time.

Full Time – Barton 45 Market Drayton 0

Man of the Match – Ben Murphy

So what could we take from today?

Like Drayton Manor Park the game was a 'thrilling' encounter in which the forwards competed like animals fit for a 'Zoo', with Tom Robinson being in a 'Land' of his own after his smack on the nose and in the end we gave Market Drayton a 'Schooling' in open running rugby. The Market Drayton Physio is an 'Amazing Attraction' (sorry Sarah, err I think) and that just leaves the 'Hospitality', which Digger, the Landlord at the Kings Head, and I will try to improve between the Club in years to come.

The MD Coach was running the line and paid our Club a massive compliment. We had spoken at length during the game at their place and I had to agree that we had the benefit of, and handled better, a poor refereeing performance on that occasion. However, today he was full of praise for our performance and couldn't understand why we were not pushing for promotion. He also said that he particularly liked our number 10. My response was that he is tall, slim for his 40 years, has nice legs but, despite his balding head, he is Ginger like Giles and Debs. He soon decided that maybe he wasn't all he was cracked up to be.

The MD supporters were courteous, knowledgeable and great fun to be around, just as many of the Clubs are in this league. Maybe it's time to consider old rugby principals and revisit the old ways of Rugby Hospitality. I know Digger will agree.

St Leonards 25 - Barton 32 - 12th March 2011

FYT has spent hours and hours in the Skinny Kitten sipping frothy Latte's and scoffing sticky buns, and this is why.....

We had played St Leonards 4 weeks previously in the league with Barton having had an off day, but coming away with a 16 – 5 victory. On the journey across, I started to think about what we know about St Leonards. Penny Pit, The Bouncy Rouge Heed and Grace Face grew more and more concerned at my silence and sporadic giggles.

So what did we know about St Leonards?

We knew that they were stronger in the backs than the forwards, that their No 10 dictated their play with a good kicking game and that their No12 was a real threat with his speed, strength and choice of running lines.

We also knew that, as Jonny Simons proved in the home game, if we could get good ball from the set piece and the breakdown hard yards could be gained from a running No 8. However, Jonny wasn't playing today !

We knew that historically this proud Club are harder to beat at home than on their travels.

I knew that each time I had visited I managed to be late and on each occasion for the very same reason. I could see the Club but somehow could never locate the entrance.

I knew that the last time I played here I was 15 minutes late for the start of the match and had to suffer humiliation from Titley and Fitzgerald. I also knew that on that day kicking was of the highest quality as Dave Ward put St Leonards to the sword and Dave Beckham scored a last minute free kick at Old Trafford against Greece to qualify England for the World Cup Finals.

Dave Rowe and I knew that the last time I had visited here, it was to attend a Staffordshire RFU meeting and that after that meeting we both felt that we were very much outsiders and looked upon as a small village Rugby Club that had little to offer both on and off the field of play. Cynical maybe, but we were determined to set the record straight for the future!

But today was going to be different as I had looked on Google maps and knew exactly where to go to find the entrance and we had set off with plenty of time to spare for the 2.15 kick off. I hadn't bargained for the no right turn sign though and once again we got lost. Luckily Penny Pit got us there on time and then we found out some things we didn't know about St Leonards.

We found out that they have a very intricate bright blue respect barrier that can be wheeled off and back onto a storage drum (see pic). We also found out that they show little respect for their respect barrier (see same pic) unlike at Barton where we show total respect for our new 'very yellow' respect barrier.

We then found out that we were very early due to the fact that the match didn't kick off at 2.15 but at 3.00pm. We therefore decided to go and watch the first half of St Leonards 3rd XV v Barton 2nd XV and so I wrote a few lines about that, which can be seen on the second team link.

Firsts

The pre game lineout drills were looking solid with Huddy and stand in hooker 'Blue Boots' Cox hitting the right spot with great accuracy for the jumpers to win clean ball. The portents looked good as we were confident of dominating at the scrum and therefore our set pieces should produce clean ball for our backs.



St Leonards kicked off, Barton stood and watched, nobody advanced to challenge for the ball and immediately we gave away possession (will we ever learn). Following 5 minutes defending in our own half Barton turned over the ball and under pressure, Jamie Maxwell elected to kick across field rather take the easier option of finding touch on the short side. The St Leonards wing caught the ball and with only Shaun Leek to beat he managed to wriggle out of the tackle and went over the line to score a gift of a try. The conversion was missed and the score was St Leonards 5 Barton 0.



From the restart St Leonards secured the ball and cleared their lines. Sam Murphy was his usual assured self at fullback, caught the ball and set off on a run, which gained 30 metres before he put Matt 'Rocky' Knight in on the wing to take the ball on. We knocked on at the ruck, St Leonards won the scrum, cleared and Murphy again ran the ball back at them. Jack Aldridge, playing at his favoured scrum half, took the ball on from the ruck, St Leonards infringed and Birdy made it St Leonards 5 Barton 3 with the penalty kick.



St Leonards kicked off and as Thorpedo was about to secure the ball Huddy ran into him and the ball was knocked on (here we go again). From the scrum St Leonards had a series of phases before Barton's strong defence again won turn over ball. Jack was showing signs of a strong performance at scrum half with a varied game of quick accurate passing and deftness in taking the ball on. It was from one of these breaks that St Leonards gave away a penalty and Jamie put us up to within 15 metres of the St Leonards try line. St Leonards were competing well at the lineout, which put Huddy under pressure and his accurate pre match throwing started to suffer. St Leonards stole the ball and cleared their lines. Rocky caught the clearance, sidestepped his opposing winger and looked to put Murphy in rather than take the ball on. The St Leonards winger intercepted, ran in another gifted try and suddenly the score was St Leonards 12 Barton 3.



Again Barton erred at the restart as the ball didn't travel 10 metres but on this occasion we played the ball and St Leonards won a scrum on the half way line. A pattern was forming. We seemed to be making errors at critical moments and handing over possession and scores to St Leonards. St Leonards were competing at the lineout, which was affecting Huddy's confidence at the throw in but most frustrating was the persistent offside at the scrum from the St Leonards No 9 and the persistent wheeling to negate Barton's dominance. This made life difficult for Dave Palin at 8 and prevented the pick and go. It also resulted in slow ball for Jack who was snagged by their back row more often than we would have liked.



Again Barton turned over the ball and put the home side under pressure. St Leonards then cleared their lines and the ball went straight out resulting in a Barton lineout just outside the St Leonards 22. Huddy hit the spot, Rowe secured the ball and Barton mauled superbly, with Brookes and MBUK dominant, to suck in the defence. The ball went through the hands to Murphy who was tackled 2 metres out. Jack again picked and went to 1 metre out and then the ball was passed out for 'Blue Boots' Cox to sell a dummy and score. Birdy converted and the score was St Leonards 12 Barton 10.



We cocked up another restart, then Birdy missed a penalty but Barton were starting to dominate both possession and territory when we scored a try of the highest quality straight from the training ground.



From a penalty on the St Leonards 5 metre line near the right wing Jack Aldridge showed quick hands and feet to work a switch penalty move, which fooled a blitz St Leonards defence and as the ball went through the hands Birdy showed his growing maturity as a rugby player to put Murphy in on the left wing for a try. The conversion was missed and the score was St Leonards 12 Barton 15.



St Leonards then came back again with a penalty to take the score to 15 each and what a game we had on our hands.



Barton then applied pressure and started to show real quality. The forwards were too much for the home side both in speed and fitness and worked the ball forward by great link play and rucking, which created quick ball for Jack in the loose. From a ruck inside the home team's half Jack set Jamie away to feed Matt Cox who showed his quality with a break that took 3 defenders out of the game. With only the fullback to beat he took the contact and fed the ever present James Thorpe to go over for a converted try.

Half Time – St Leonards 15 Barton 22

Jack Aldridge, Sam Murphy, Matt Cox and Matt Knight had been exceptional in the first half but Jack injured his back and had to be replaced. Dean Fradgley's Thrusters coming on to lock, Rowe moved to flanker, Cox to centre and Lee Coton to scrum half in a reshuffle.



Playing down the slope Barton started to take control of possession, territory and set piece. The lineout was still proving a problem but the St Leonards forwards were tiring and made error after error. Barton didn't capitalise and with Birdy missing three more penalty kicks and Jamie one, neither of them were showing the quality of Dave Ward or Dave Beckham on this occasion. With Barton's dominance at the scrum, maybe we made some wrong decisions given the penalty count going in our favour.

Eventually, Birdy was successful and a long period of dominance had resulted in only 3 points for Barton and we all hoped that this wouldn't come back to haunt us. St Leonards 15 Barton 25



Our fears were justified as the St Leonards winger took a ball out wide from a good series of St Leonards phases, he cut inside sidestepping his way past 4 defenders to score under the posts. St Leonards 22 Barton 25.



This game was one of the highest standard now with both teams playing exciting running rugby. From one of these moves Sean Leek was put in on the wing and with 2 defenders for company he crashed over the line only for the referee to give held up from 10 metres away. He did apologise to Sleek when he arrived to see him on top of the grounded ball but the decision had been made.



It was all Barton now and as Lee picked the ball from the back of a ruck in the opposing 22 their forward slapped the ball from his hand whilst on the floor and unbelievably the referee gave a scrum against us for a knock on rather than a penalty for us.



St Leonards worked back up field and when a ball broke out of the back of a ruck into open play Jamie Maxwell picked it up only to be deemed to have handled in a ruck. Penalty and suddenly it was St Leonards 25 Barton 25.



Big John came on for Tom Robinson at prop and Sleek made another big run to the heart of the defence fending off 2 players to vent his frustration at his disallowed try. With 15 minutes remaining Lee Coton picked form the base of the scrum 5 metres out and crashed through to score the bonus point winning 4th try. Birdy converted, St Leonards 25 Barton 32.

We knocked on from the restart once more.....GGRRRRRRRR!!!!

St Leonards came back at us and won a scrum 10 metres out only for the referee to give off side against Lee. Quite remarkable!!!!

A quick tap resulted in the ball going through the hands and against most teams the winger would have scored in the corner but Rocky, Murphy and Coton put him into touch and from the lineout Barton cleared their lines to win a great game of rugby.

Man of the Match – Matt Cox

My thoughts returned to my journey back from that Staffordshire RFU meeting with Dave Rowe. Following that meeting plans were put in place, structures were formed and Barton Rugby started a journey to compete on and off the field. Back in the days of that meeting we faced teams such as Cannock, Rugeley and St Leonards with trepidation and never beat them. This season we have played each of them twice and of those 6 outings we have lost just once, 16 – 9 at Cannock. We also face Cannock in the Owen Cup final. The hard work of people such as Rigby, Tolley, Steen, Thorne, Roberts, Titley, Rowe, Gale, Bentley, Johnson, Bennett and more recently Simons and the younger players, plus many more, has started to bear fruit. I am ranting now but I don't give a Silverback's left hang down. I love this rugby club and it is going places. Thanks boys !!!!!

Barton 25 - Rugeley 23 - 5th March 2011

FYT has muscled his way back into the reporter's role for the next two weeks, and has set a new standard of 2,200 words for future match reports. Thanks ! No really, thanks !

Due to a combination of writer's block and my care in the community commitments to Red Rose Jane (Penelope Pitstop) and Mofe Streetdog, I feel it necessary to apologise for the late submission of this match report.



Barton had already contested 4 games this season with their close rivals at Rugeley and today there were 2 further encounters on the cards with a double header. Barton's 2nd XV having enjoyed three victories, two against Rugeley's 3rd XV and one against their 2nd XV whereas; the 1st XV had a thrilling league match away at Rugeley in November when having dominated a first half by building an 18 points to nil lead they capitulated and found themselves 20 points to 18 behind with 5 minutes remaining. Remarkably, 2 late tries produced a final score line of Rugeley 20 Barton 28 in what was a fantastic game of rugby. Surely today couldn't produce such a thrilling encounter.



The Barton 2nd XV v Rugeley 2nd XV kick off was an early one and played at John Taylor High School with Barton having 26 players available. First blood of the day went to Rugeley who secured victory with a late penalty making the final result Barton 7 Rugeley 10. This game was not one for the purists and we all agreed that the tight 5's enjoyed it more than anybody else. We also hoped that both the score line and quality on display was not a sign of things to come later in the afternoon.



With seven key players out (Woolly – Knee, Cliffy – Shoulder, Pow Pow – Shoulder, Suttly – Ribs, Tabs – Neck, Jimmy G – Weightlifting in Grimsby and Birdy – Shagging on a train somewhere near Bristol) Barton still managed to field a strong line up. Jack ‘Murphy’ Aldridge came in on the wing, Mikey B UK’s Ass came in as lock for his first 1st XV start of the season, Big Dave Palin returned at No 8, Matt ‘Fantasy League’ Cox reverted to centre and our bench consisted of Sleek, Big John and The Dog to cover the back row, prop and the backs respectively.



Rugeley came into the game in confident mood having won five out of their last six league games and climbed up to 5th in the league with one eye on a promotion spot. It would take a strong performance from our play makers today and resolute defending across the team to repeat the victory we enjoyed back in November.



Jamie Maxwell kicked off for Barton and put up a hanging ball, which was chased down by Dave Rowe who put the Rugeley lock under pressure enabling Barton to win turn over ball. Barton were quick to capitalise on an unorganised defence and a combination of Maxwell’s vision and Rowe’s communicative prowess provided quick ball from a ruck 5 metres from the try line, out on the right wing. Maxwell’s looping pass was confidently

helped on by Rowe and Jack Aldridge grasped his opportunity, stepping inside the cover defence to score after 2 minutes. Maxwell stroked the conversion home with ease and before the touchline masses could even contemplate disrespecting the new 'very yellow' respect barrier Barton were 7 – 0 ahead.



From the restart Barton secured good ball and a ruck formed but having committed more players than necessary, when Jonny Simons picked the ball and ran he found himself isolated with no support which, enabled the experienced Rugeley forwards to turn the ball over and it was Barton's turn to be on the back foot with an unorganised defence. Rugeley made the most of the situation and the ball went through the hands of the Rugeley backs for a try on the left wing. The conversion was missed and after only 4 minutes we had two tries and the score was Barton 7 Rugeley 5 with supporters still turning up to the game and not even a mention of the new 'very yellow' respect barrier.



Rugeley worked the ball back up field from the restart and won a scrum 20 metres out. Tom Robinson was deemed to have not bound onto the shirt of his opposing prop and despite his bemused look the referee awarded a penalty to Rugeley. The ensuing kick sailed through the posts to make the score Barton 7 Rugeley 8. Still no respect had been shown to the new 'very yellow' respect barrier by the supporters.

So, after 3 phases of play we had 3 scores coming from opportunities that had arisen from errors. As exciting as it was for the supporters it was frustrating for the coaches with both Kev and Ski looking increasingly frustrated on the touchline. Surely this couldn't go on.



Rugeley secured the restart and started to look confident as they again worked the ball into the Barton half where the Barton defence had to be strong against a team that looked a mile apart from the one they had faced in November. Rugeley looked better organised and stronger in the backs than previously, with their No 6 having a strong running game; their No 12 offering strong supportive running lines and their young No 9 looking sharp with ball in hand and starting to mix things up with an intelligent kicking game.



Barton's season has been built on a strong defence, luring teams into a false sense of security, forcing errors and then unleashing a level of flair and pace on the counter attack, only matched by Harborne, the runaway league leaders. These strengths again started to come to the fore and following a knock on in the tackle Barton won a scrum from which the confident front row of Brookes, Hudson and Robinson secured the ball which ignited a counter attack of the highest quality.



Jonny Simons picked from the back of the scrum and linked with Quidditch and Matt Cox before receiving the ball back to bludgeon through the Rugeley defence before offloading once more to Quidditch who popped it back to Cox. Cox took on the last two defenders and looked to put Aldridge in for his second try only for the covering tackler to deny him. From the ruck the ball was quickly recycled and Jamie Maxwell, having turned 40 last week (sorry Jamie), showed his experience and awareness by placing an exquisite cross filled kick for Murphy to claim and out run his opposing winger to score Barton's second try of the game. Jamie converted and it was Barton 14 Rugeley 8 after just 15 minutes. Still there had been no respect shown to the new 'very yellow' respect barrier by the supporters.



Rugeley again became dominant of both possession and territory without threatening until Barton made two uncharacteristic howling defensive errors. The first came from a Rugeley ruck on the left wing about 5 metres out. The whole Barton defence drifted left to negate a move from the Rugeley backs only to leave the blind side completely free for the Rugeley lock to pick up and run in a try. The conversion was kicked and we were only halfway through the first half with four tries on the board and a seesawing score of Barton 14 Rugeley 15.



From the kick off came the second howler. The ball didn't travel 10 metres and Barton stood and watched as Rugeley played and secured the ball. The Rugeley 12 made an impressive strong running line catching the Barton defence on the hop and was tackled ten metres out by Murphy, Murphy or Murphy. From the ruck Rugeley scored their third try of the day but missed the conversion to move into a 20 to 14 lead.



Martin De Ridder (Rugeley 2nd XV Captain) was overjoyed on the touchline and armed with a pint in his hand and a pair of 'Brothel Creepers' on his feet he did a little jig, which took him down the slippery slope where he almost showed some disrespect to the new 'very yellow' respect barrier. However, due to a move only seen before by the likes of Wayne sleep, he managed to avoid contact, spilling any beer and slipping over and finally the new 'very yellow' respect barrier had been shown some respect.



Barton wouldn't lie down and although Rugeley had more of the possession and territory, the Barton mistakes dried up and they became frustrated at not being able to break down the Barton defence. James Thorpe, Dave Palin, Dave Rowe, Mikey B and Jonny Simons worked tirelessly in the tight and on the odd occasion that Rugeley did break through the strong midfield of Lee Coton and Matt Cox, the Murphy triplets did what they did best and snuffed out any threat.



Rugeley then infringed at the breakdown, conceded a penalty and Jamie Maxwell kicked the points to finish off an almost flawless first half performance on his part.

Half Time – Barton 17 Rugeley 20

Early in the second half, Barton again committed too many players to a ruck having already secured the ball and as in the early part of the first half, Jonny Simons isolated himself and was pinged for holding on. Rugeley kicked the penalty and brought the score to Barton 17 Rugeley 23.



The rain was driving hard now and Maxwell pinned Rugeley in their half with a mixture of exquisite kicking from hand and the vision of a higher level playmaker to put in our strong running players. The pressure was mounting on the Rugeley line and after a series of phases Big Dave Palin took the ball on with venom only previously shown by his Auntie Sarah in America. He was brought down one metre short but popped the ball to Rowe who was very unfortunate to knock on with the try line beckoning. Barton created opening after opening but the deteriorating conditions led to a series of knock ons until eventually the ball was spread wide for Murphy to score out on the left wing. Barton 22 Rugeley 23 with half an hour remaining.

From the kick off Barton won possession and Simons took the ball on again fending off two defenders. Once more he had no support and when he was isolated by the Rugeley defence he lost possession but was to pay the greater price of slipping a disc in his back. Simons was replaced by Slick at No 6.

Then something came back to haunt me.....the Range Rover HSE Sport.....yes that's right, I had to lift Simons into it and take him home therefore missing 15 minutes of the game. Penny Pit took over my note pad and this is her account of what happened whilst I was away from the game.

- Jack scored (Didn't we know that anyway)?
- Woolly was influential (strange as he was stood next to me on the touchline but I guess the fact he was drinking Guinness and Black showed an undying support for the boys in Red, White and Black).
- Quidditch and Lee were pinnacle (ok I will take your word for it PP)
- Coxy was hungover and probably still pissed from the night before and shit by his standards (Harsh, but he was very drunk).
- Big John replaced one of the prop boys.
- Rugeley missed a penalty and were dirty buggers (Bless).

I returned with ten minutes remaining and just in time to see Jamie kick a penalty from 35 metres to take Barton into a 25 to 23 lead.

Now we just needed to be disciplined, remain patient, give nothing away, secure possession and if the opportunity came our way, score a 4th try for a bonus point.

We retained possession well, worked up the field and when we maybe should have been playing a tighter game, we tried to run the ball. Luckily, they knocked on and we won a scrum just inside our own half. The referee then gave a penalty for feeding against Quidditch. Rugeley elected to kick from 40 metres out. Then someone opened their mouth, the referee gave a further ten metres and in his own quiet way, Stuart Cox was incandescent with rage on the touchline. God know what Kev and Ski were thinking. The penalty was missed.....PHEW STU !!!!

Barton then got smart and retained possession with a series of phases, which ended with a Barton scrum on the Rugeley 5 metre line. The bonus point was beckoning and the clock was running down. Ping, another penalty for feeding awarded to Rugeley. A smack on the nose for Huddy (now I wonder who that might have been) and the time was up. Rugeley had to run the ball and Barton's trademark pressing defence forced another knock on and the game was ours.

This was an entertaining game for the neutral, a great game for the victors, a game of errors for the defeated and a game from hell for the coaches but, as always when we play Rugeley, it was a great game for our sport.



Next week it's away at St Leonards and we look forward to our trip to Stafford knowing that we gave 44 players a game of rugby today, have 7 players coming back from injury and on the 26th March we will play our first Vet's game at Veseyans. Barton Rugby has never been healthier.

The future is bright, the future is Red, White and Black, just like Woolly's pint !

Man of the Match – Jamie Maxwell

"Where's Warley ?" I heard someone ask. The posh guys told me they didn't know and that this was in fact a call in fox hunting ; "Ware 'war" was to warn horsemen to beware of barbed wire ahead. I didn't know that, and I still didn't know where Warley was, but I knew they were bottom of the league and I knew they would be hungry for our scalp.

The game at the school was a good idea as the boggy conditions at Holland Park meant it was unplayable and would have severely restricted our backs. Warley have some seriously big units in the pack and we could see the set pieces would be tough, and as the game progressed we could see that a lot of work was being generated in the scrums. Within ten minutes we had seen that our backs would lead us to a victory, but only if the forwards could hold off their pack. Quidditch and Jamie worked well together and even without Lee Coton having Birdy and Wooly in the centres, Murphys on the wing and full back, and the recovering Matt Bloxham on the other wing, would mean Jamie had options galore.



But our game plan was to run it back inside and use our forward pods to create overlaps, and to be fair, that's what happened. Sometimes it didn't work because we couldn't keep hold of the ball or recycle it quickly

enough, but Warley made sure that anything in the tight would be slow and hard fought for. Bloxham showed he was ready to return to the field with his first touch of the ball where he managed to put a foot in touch, but before the ref whistled up his little run, a handoff left his opposite number with time on his arse to contemplate the fact he had an out and out flanker on the wing.

With the wind behind us Birdy put us 3-0 up with a nice penalty and the red tee was working its magic.



Wooly then scored his trademark try by cutting back inside and flopping over the line after some nice phases of play by our back row. Again Birdy converted and a 10-0 lead looked nice. Another penalty was fluffed simply because Murphy took the tee from Roberts and gave it to Bird instead of the tried and tested routine of Roberts providing the tee directly to Bird. We wouldn't make that mistake again.





We could and should have scored many more. We had a kick and chase where Murphy couldn't quite out gun his opponent :



But we got a scrum and pushed it over - Brookesey saw that we had grounded the ball but the referee said it was held up.



From the resulting scrum we saw Jonny act as scrum half, feeding Birdy who ghosted through the gaps and touched down, but again the ref said he was held up. Bummer.







I've been saying for weeks that patience is a virtue, and if you are patient it is worth it in the end. And it was. We kept things tight and the forwards meshed extremely well together. Patient build up.



After a lineout and two phases of play, Matt Cox peeled off a ruck and ran an outside centre line taking a lovely pop from Jamie and found there was no-one at home to tackle him. Flop. Over the line he goes and Birdy converts – there was proper transfer of tee this time.





But what impressed me was how calm everyone in the Barton team were and when things didn't go to plan, we didn't panic, we thought clearly under pressure (T-cup as Sir Clive says), and pulled it back round. A scattered team, a kick ahead, a fumble and recovery from Maxwell and it looked like we were in bother but Jamie saw everyone was in front of him and decided a drop goal was in order and it sailed over from close on the half way line. Confidence was high, morale was high, we were 20-0 up, half time came around, and were we brim full of beans.

The second half into the wind would be different and the front row of Robinson, Hudson and Brookes saw a lot more of the ball as they rumbled up field. Rowe and Jonny Simons ran around the fringes, ball in one hand, opponent's throat in another effectively choking the life out of the opposition. And with James Thorpe sniping at everything that moved it was clear that Warley was not going to get much space to play with. The ball carrier knew he had support on both sides.



Soon though they got a penalty and although a long way off with the help from the wind it sailed over and their tails were up again. Birdy decided that wasn't right and put over another of his own to make it 23-3, but we weren't slowing down and soon we saw gaps in the Warley defence. Matt Cox thundered through and broke more than a few tackles getting into their 22, finding Thorpe outside and then Ben Murphy outside him, and although there was still a lot of work to do, he remained calm and fought his way over for a well deserved try.



Birdy converted and it was 30-3. Then Barton stopped. Warley's forwards rumbled upfield and everytime they were sent back a bit they kicked us back into our half and soon we were under pressure on our own 5 yard line and we let them score.

The last try for me was by far the best and showed huge confidence and clear, calm thought. After a number of phases of play Jamie spun the ball out to Birdy who saw an overlap on his right but that he'd got big second

row James Gardner and Flanker Matt Cox on the wing. Pop. Ball collected by Jimmy who calmly straightened up, drew his man, and floated a perfectly timed pass to Coxy who drifted over the line for his second try.



No drama, no stress, no fluster and no panic. 35-8 and we'd got the bonus points that take us to seventh in the league, and after Cannock and Bloxwich have their points deducted we will be up to sixth – mid table, safe and playing some of the best rugby I've seen on the fields of Barton.

Play coolly and calmly and this is the type of result we can achieve

Clee Hill 21 - Barton 10 - 19th February 2011

I've been demoted ! Assistant to the sub-editor with special reporting responsibilities for Civic Societies. I'll be writing about what is an appropriate use for the Victory Hall and whether marshmallows should be served with

coffee at WRI meetings. They've promoted FYT to cover sporting events and as you'll see why once you read his first report :

The last time we travelled to these parts Jonny Simons' Range Rover Sport HSE Sat Nav gave us a tour of the Black Country and we arrived late at Cleobury Mortimer after a 2 hour and 20 minute journey. On this occasion I was in better hands as 'Penelope Pitstop' and her trusty sidekick 'The Bouncy Rouge Heed' got us there on time in an hour and a half by use of a Renault Megane and a Collins road map. As we took a wrong turn into the Club we were greeted with a full frontal view of the Clee Hill tight 5 urinating through a hedge, Penny Pit laughed, Bouncy Rouge Heed went even more rouge and as it turned out it wasn't the only thing they were going to urinate all over today.

The game started on a sodden pitch after a night of rain and with a deep fog lingering around the low lying area. This didn't look like it was going to be a day for our running backs.

Clee Hill gained possession and their forwards worked the fringes well to move the ball up the field and draw first blood as their No 10 converted a penalty given against Barton for coming in from the side at the breakdown. This Barton side are resolute though and their defence worked tirelessly to prevent any further intrusion into the Barton 22. With Matt Cox, Jonny Simons and James Thorpe in the back row it was going to take something extraordinary to break down the Barton defence.

Gradually, Barton became dominant, Birdy had his kicking boots on and kept Clee Hill pinned in their own half for long periods. It was from a long penalty kick to touch that leaping Jimmy Gardener won a line out and Barton got the ball through the hands in the backs for the first time. Lee Coton drew the blitz defence and passed to Woolly on the half way line for him to do what he does best and beat 3 tackles to sprint under the posts. Birdy converted, Clee Hill 3 Barton 7.

Clee Hill came back at us again keeping it tight around the fringes and their back row carried ball after ball to move up field. The Clee Hill 7 was having a good game and once more when he went to ground the referee deemed Barton to have infringed at the breakdown and the Clee Hill 10 added a second penalty. Clee Hill 6 Barton 7.

The game was a tight one with Clee Hill having a more dominant scrum, which Barton were doing well to hold and Barton having more individual flair. Clee Hill put up many a high ball to test the Barton back 3 of Sam Murphy, Ben Murphy and Jack, err is it Murphy, all of whom coped with the bombardment admirably running ball after ball back from their half. It was following one of the Murphy triplets breaks that Barton moved towards the Clee Hill 22 and were awarded a penalty, up steps Birdy who struck his kick perfectly only to see it rebound off the post. Barton were quicker to the ball, winning possession towards the right wing. From the ruck, Quidditch saw the space to the left with a two man overlap and took an angled run to set Dave Rowe on his way. Dave drew the two remaining defenders brilliantly and with the lethal finishers of Lee Coton and Woolly outside him he forgot to pass (get your ears waxed Dave), was tackled and from the ruck Barton won a penalty that Birdy converted. Clee Hill 6 Barton 10.

With only a few minutes to go before half time Clee Hill again worked the ball up field around the fringes of the breakdown. Their 7 put their 8 in to go over in the corner when suddenly Matt (this is no fantasy league) Cox made a try saving tackle of a quality rarely seen at this level of rugby. The ball got stuck in the ruck and the referee blew up for half time.

HALF TIME - CLEE HILL 6 BARTON 10

The referee had a good first half and was consistent in his decision making for both teams. He did not allow any time for the ball carrier to set the ball when going to ground and therefore was quick to blow for holding on. He also gave no margin for the Clee Hill hooker and Crag Hudson in throwing in at the lineout and therefore was quick to blow up for a not straight throw. This proved odd later on in the second half but more of that later.

The pitch was now a mud bath on the left wing and somehow, that's where the majority of the play took place in the second half. Clee Hill started well and their tight 5 started to assert themselves in the scrums pushing Barton back on a regular basis. Barton won a lineout just inside the Clee Hill half and chose to go with 5 men in the line. Clee Hill had 6 men in the line and despite protestations the referee waved play on after Clee Hill stole the ball. From the resulting phases of play Clee Hill won a scrum 10 metres out from which their 7 broke free without the ball, Thorpey tackled him but the damage was done (I told you it would take something extraordinary to breach the defence of this Barton backrow) and as the number 8 picked up from the scrum he had time to put in their backs who went over for a try. The conversion was missed. Clee Hill 11 Barton 10.

Clee Hill's tight 5 won them a penalty when the Barton scrum popped up under pressure and the 10 converted. Clee Hill 14 Barton 10

Towards the end of the game the Clee Hill back row finally got the reward they deserved for their effort round the fringes with their No 8 going over for a converted try. Clee Hill 21 Barton 10.

This seemed to spark Barton into action and a marauding run by Lee Coton saw Matt Cox in support carry the ball into contact, the momentum was surely going to reward us with a try and then the opposing No1 played the ball on the ground turning it over in the ruck for them to clear their lines. Lee Coton wasn't happy as the chest of their No 13 found out in the tackle. Jonny Simons carried many a ball, gaining the hard yards only to be frustratingly pinged time after time for not releasing on the ground.

Barton rarely saw the ball in the second half mainly due to a dominant Clee Hill tight 5 and the awarding of not straight at the lineouts. When Barton did get the ball, decision making was not the best as twice we had 3 man overlaps only to kick the ball away on one occasion and take the ball into contact on the second occasion. Birdy was frustrated at 10 as a number of passes went to ground and it just wasn't going our way. Our front rowers Tom Robinson, Craig Hudson, Adam Brookes and replacement Jonny Sutton worked tirelessly both in the tight and in the loose.

On another day we could have put in excess of 30 points on the board and as predicted this wasn't a day for our running backs but maybe we need to work on offloading and supporting the ball carrier more. So next week it's Warley at home but a warning has to be heeded, they may be bottom of the league but unless we learn to get our individual flair to gel as a team in finishing off the good phases we create, it will be no pushover.

So thanks Steve, but I'm still gutted. I bet I won't even be allowed to run on with Birdy's tee any more. Until I get my job back it'll be BLENDED whisky in the hipflask ! So there !

Barton 16 - St Leonards 5 - 12th February 2011

St Leonards are a bit of an enigma to me. They have played at a much higher level and you can see some of their players, especially the standoff, are class acts. But recently we have had a better run of form and the odds were in our favour.

The Facebook banter on the Friday revolved around whether Danny Carlin had a better try scoring record than Birdy, and Matt decided to set the record straight. I arrived late but just in time to get the favoured red kicking tee out of the car to allow him to put Barton 3-0 up. An earlier penalty had sailed between the posts but the ref had not signalled a score, much to the disgust of the players, coaches and Steve Dixon who could not even be consoled by the lovely Jane or the offer of a lolly.

St Leo came back and thanks to a few missed tackles they made it over for an unconverted try and the first half ground to a halt at 5-3 to the visitors. Lee Coton messed about at scrum half and harassed their 9, 8, 7, 6 and basically anyone without a Barton shirt, and his sniping at the rucks was welcomed by the Barton pack

who were always on hand. Brookesey and Tom propped up Huddy who hadn't the best of games throwing in but the reason soon became clear. St Leo had a jumper at two who was allowed to jump across the line to the point that in one lineout he actually landed our side of his opposite number. Huddy countered this by throwing round him, which got pinged every time (and not one of these nice Orange Skype type pings either). Niall told us because they weren't penalised for jumping across that St Leo should keep the big jumper on all the time as the scrums we also solid and often pushed us off the ball, but fortunately the St Leo coach thought otherwise and took him off. Our lineouts immediately improved and our scrums stabilised. Jimmy G and Rowie loved the tight close play that dominated much of the game and game activities tended to stay within a few metres of the breakdown. Man of the match Jonny Simons, James Thorpe and Leek loved the attention, the tackles and the possession that this game provided them, and it was only desperate tackling from the St Leo defence that kept the scores low. Eventually we got another penalty and the red tee did its thing again and for most of the second half we were 6-5 up.

Our backs were very comfortable and for the first time we saw Ben and Sam Murphy work together well, passing between each other, always knowing where to go and where the support was. And that support was in the form of centres Matt Bird and Matt Cox who had shaved his head after last week's smack to the bonce. Matt Bird should have shaved his chin too, and he wouldn't have got a smack to the face later that night, but that's another story....

Jamie Maxwell kicked well at 10 and fed his hungry backs, and made Mark Mills on the other wing chase many a ball down the touchlines. It was a nervous last few minutes as St Leo turned us over every time we got in their 22, and booted us back downfield. The team knew a careless penalty would put them in the driving seat and our fragile morale could shatter. Jonny Sutton came on for an exhausted Brookesey who had given his all and injected life and passion to a flagging pack. We kept our shape and kept pressing on.

But this was a game for the back row. Jonny picked up from rucks, and scrums and ran crossfield looking for victims, mostly in the form of the St Leo centres as their ten and openside flanker never seemed quite able (or willing ?) to get there. James Thorpe would always be on the outside and Shaun on the inside, lots of space had been made and we knew eventually an overlap would appear that we would be able to exploit. Birdy took a pop from Thorpey and saw Murphy outside so took a lovely straight line to protect the space outside. The covering winger who had spent all afternoon trying to subdue Murphy, drifted out allowing Bird to keep the direct line and score under the posts. A jubilant "F.U. Danny Carlin" shout from our top scorer released the frustrations of the game for the whole side and the conversion was made. We kept the ball tight for the rest of the game and ran down the clock winning 13-5.

But wait a minute, the referee said it was 16-5 ? It appears he did allow Birdy's first penalty and when he asked about our conservative playing tactics under a 9-5 lead, it was easy to say "well we thought it was 6-5".

So that's it. We got the points we needed and are still fourth from bottom. Having St Leo below us in the table and keeping a losing bonus point from them may be important later in the season but for now I'm happy. The team played well, we won a game we should have won, and club morale is high. That is until we got the next chapter in the Keygate saga as Dom Tydeman ran off with the Vallies bag, but at least it wasn't my fault this time.

Barton 10 - Harborne 48 - 5th February 2011

Harborne. Heart of Birmingham. Top of the league. Tough to beat.

But there was always something wrong. They played well together on the pitch but never seemed to be a team off the pitch. The lack of Harborne ties and club cohesion after our last match was deemed "disgraceful" by Dave Rowe, and for once he was right. Things didn't add up.

Our firsts played their firsts, our seconds played their thirds, our three quarters were better than their number eight, our tight five dominated in their 22 and the 9/10 combination divided opinion. All of these mathematical alternatives confused the hell out of the players, but using logarithmic constants as the basis of lineout calls ensured no-one, not even the jumpers, knew where the ball was going. “ 2.716345878 to the power of 3 !”. Somehow we won every ball and I put it down to the fact we were playing at the centre of learning in Barton – the John Taylor High School, and its “outstanding” Ofsted status. Harborne aren’t stupid, playing their rugby in the lee of the University, and chose to recite passages from Shakespearian tragedies to demonstrate their intellectual prowess. But we were a match for their Classical training and Jimmy Gardner had sussed out their system by the time the soliloquy from Othello’s third act was called, and he stole the ball from the top of the lineout. In the second half Shaun Leek read their Merchant of Venice (act 4, scene 2) call and smothered their centre with a ferocity that made Rachel jump up and down clapping excitedly.

It was a battle of wit, strategy and strength and we were glad we had Quidditch to interpret.

With a front row of Brookes, Hudson and Robinson we knew this was a very mobile pack and locked together by Rowe and Gardner it was a skilful tight five; not the heaviest in the league but I challenge any team in the league to match them ball in hand. We pushed Harborne off their ball and were strong at the breakdown and in the windy lineouts. It was an evenly matched battle in the forwards. Jonny “Hand off” Simons played openside with fellow back rowers Thorpy and Dave Palin, marauding round the field at will. Now I’ve been told that it’s not very good if you keep your arm straight and elbow locked when getting up close and personal, and judging by the way the opposition backed off at speed when they saw Jonny’s straight arm, I guess they were right. Jonny tends to run laterally for a few yards, seeking a victim but in the first ten minutes, he fell back into crash centre mode and took a beautiful line off Maxwell to thunder over for a try which Birdy converted with ease.





A few minutes later and we had opened up the backs, and created a three man overlap and Bird had the ball. However as no-on told him to pass, he did not realise the impressive Harborne winger was tracking him down and took away seven points from us with a surprise tackle.



But we were on top, and a nice penalty from the far side helped boost morale.

The wind was behind us and we were creating chance after chance but couldn't quite make it stick. Harborne, when they had the ball ran at us relentlessly and I have never seen so many tackles made. At the end of the first half it was 12-10 to the visitors but our heads were up - we were dominant up front, and we created chances.

Quidditch and Jamie are linking well these days and the selection of centres gets harder and harder each week. Wooly, Coton, Cox, Bird, Maxwell, Carter-White, and then the Murphy twins for that blistering pace round the outside.



Shaun Leek prowled the touchlines, stalking his prey until coming on late in the second half, hunting down the weaker members of the Harborne flock.



Craig Hudson was as strong as an ox as usual and did everything well, and consistently. Superbly reliable and efficient - unlike the clown he gave his keys to (sorry !). Jonny Sutton came on for Tom and kept up the pressure up front and Dean "I'm still on Vegas time" Fradgley replaced the thundering Dave Palin.



But in the end the numbers didn't add up, and Harborne took every one of their chances (and a few others) while we were not able to do the same with ours. They added point after point and put their hand up with the answer before we managed to do our homework. The impressive Yorkshire referee has to take the first answer and kept writing numbers in his book until time ran out, we were told to put our pencils down, and Harborne had 48.

Harborne are the only team in our league I would actually go and watch play rugby because they play so well together. The support play was akin to what we saw in Oyannax - no rush, no panic, but brutally effective. We lost today but we learnt a lot and we could do with playing a few more games against sides like this because it makes us stronger.

We've now played all of the top three teams twice (and all in the last three weeks !), but have only played one of the six games against the three teams below us in the league. Playing like we did today will put us mid table

by the end of the season, affirming what every team has told us this year - we deserve to be playing in a higher league. Bear that in mind when we go into training for next Saturday's game.

Barton 5 - Bloxwich 13 - 22nd January 2011



Bloxwich. Unbeaten in the league. Tedious, boring but effective rugby. "We're here to win games, not to entertain" was the echoing statement from their coach. They lived up to their billing.

On balance, Barton were boring too but before you start writing to your MPs and mounting a Facebook campaign to get me sacked, hear me out.

Barton play a secure forwards game ; pod after pod, "disruptive in the loose" as one visiting supported said, and tidy set pieces. The backs carve round the outside or cut lovely lines inside making space, anticipating support. Very strong in defence, everything covered, no tackles missed. Bloxwich do the same but without the pizzaz of the Barton backs in attack.





But this weekend we were boring. The lineouts were shocking and we struggled to secure ball in our own put in, and were turned over in the rucks.





Bloxwich had all the possession, yet at half time we were 5 points up. How's that ? Well we are solid in defence. Organised, everyone talking, great positioning, and awesome first up tackling. Bloxwich, the unbeaten league leaders and a fearsome side at the best of times simply could not make their possession count. Their tactics this year have been to keep possession and kick the opposition into submission from any penalty chances in your own half - sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't but when you know you are great in defence but don't have great attacking options, that's what you do. But against fortress Barton it doesn't work and Saturday's match was a game of attrition. Boring to watch, but effective.





Murphy scored a great try late on in the first half as he burned round the outside of his winger after some lovely rolling play from the forwards. It was the first time a Bloxwich tackle was missed and we made them pay.





Bloxwich evened up the scores soon after when they managed to keep possession for over 10 minutes and patiently marched up field whilst their backs wondered why they had travelled so far for so little work. The Bloxwich centres normally have a nice day out trying to make space for the wingers or to bring their flankers back inside but Matt Bird and Matt Cox were not having any of that and I cannot remember a time when any of the opposition three quarters received the ball without a Matt for company. The Murphy twins had a quiet day and their speed was recognised and managed by the Bloxwich back line who decided that proper positioning was a better defensive option than trying to outrun the boys. Bloxwich had nothing in attack that caused any concern for our back line at all and when winger Lee Coton tackled his opposite number into touch and onto the other rugby pitch we knew they weren't going to try to go round the outside of him again. Even when we brought on the talismanic Woolston, and he made his trademark breaks, the Bloxwich defence stopped him and he was tackled more in this game than virtually all season so far. It was boring.

The forwards had a boring game too. Great effort, superbly effective in defence, but no-one's going to buy the DVD of this game. Dave Palin was always in the thick of things, soaking up Bloxwich defenders like a super strength kitchen roll, and James Thorpe was always there foraging for scraps. Palin was unlucky not to score in the dying minutes as he was deemed to have been held up and Bayley's first half performance was of a man always supporting the ball carrier and always chasing the kicks.





Jonny Simons knew his job was to stop the Bloxwich number 8 (who leads all attacks), and this he did with great aplomb. Bloxwich would try X, Y and Z. And Jonny would bring him down. Bloxwich would try A, B and C. And Jonny would bring him down. Boring to watch; but effective.



The tight five struggled in the scrums but in the loose they were everywhere. Sutton would scream around the place, with Cliffy in support and when the prey was winged Tom Robinson, Bayley, Rowie and Jimmy G would make a mess of absolutely everything. My entertainment for the day was to watch the Bloxwich scrum half throw his arms up in frustration at every breakdown as one of our tight five would "dirty" the Gilbert (he complained bitterly that he couldn't get clean ball). Nice work chaps.



Quidditch and Maxwell worked well together until Bloxwich thought young Higgins needed an elbow in the back of the head, and a little later on Jamie had a chat with the referee, but overall the partnership worked well and play moved on nicely when we had the ball.



Birdy couldn't make his kicks count and he was hugely unlucky not to score after a kick and chase (well it was a massive chase and three kicks). A try would have put us 12-0 up and but for the unlucky knock on we would have had a very different game on our hands.





Now if only we could have kept possession. Bloxwich had the ball for at least 75% of the time yesterday but could not make it count. Nothing exciting happened because both sides snuffed out any spark of excitement, and what little creative embers were fanned to a glow in the minds of the play makers were quickly extinguished by up front, no-compromise defending from both sides.

But my how we forget the basics under pressure. We practice set pieces from penalties until blue in the face, yet persist in the tap-and-go philosophy when the heat is on. Yes, there were five consecutive penalties given against Bloxwich in the Red zone in the last five minutes and you could argue that the ref should have carded their 15 or given a penalty try or both, but he didn't and we squandered every one. True we didn't have many options as our scrum was not secure, our lineouts were unreliable and we were a man down, but three points would have given us a nice bonus point. But that's rugby.



It must have been an awesome game to play in but it was not a spectator's favourite. We saw Cliffy walk off with a crumbled collar bone (can you not simply break it like everyone else ?) and saw Matt Cox step in at Hooker - nice work by the way. Dean Jackson and Woolston came on at the end of the match to add some spice to a dull game, but even the Hensonesque flair of big Dean was snuffed out by a Bloxwich defensive

wall, and Woolston didn't score. I'll say that again - Woolston didn't score. That in itself should tell you something about the defensive characteristics of Bloxwich and why it was a boring game to watch.



But wait a minute. Bloxwich are unbeaten in the league and supposedly represent the best this league can offer in terms of competitors. Barton could have and probably should have won yesterday and no-one in the Bloxwich team would have felt it an unfair result. We have an awesome club, we have flair and strength in attack and a defensive structure that can hold out the best. Does it need to be attractive every week ? Does it need to be pretty ? Or does it need to be effective ? The fact is we didn't miss any opportunities on Saturday ; we just weren't given any, and in the cool light of a Sunday morning I'm reflecting on my earlier statement. We made chances, took those that we were given, and eliminated as many opportunities as possible that the opposition generated. It was boring, but was effective and sometimes Rugby is like that. Well done guys....keep it up.

Cleobury Mortimer 17 - Barton 0 - 15th January 2011

Tipperary, Timbuktu, Cleobury Mortimer. It's a long, long way to them all.

CM are a strong side and this Saturday had home advantage playing on Welsh soil. The combined effects of economy class air travel and jet lag meant our team were not as refreshed as we could have been, and it was always going to be a struggle, but we played well and unusually allowed some late scores to flatter the hosts. Kev Denver coached, played and wrote the following match report so I owe him beers.

Another tough day at the office for the Barton lads, with 9 players un-available from last week's impressive victory over Cannock, the team sheet showed how strong our squad has become this year. This RFU pitch with its generous size should have favoured our running backs but it was not to be.

Barton started well from the hosts kick off, we took clean ball in the forwards and retained possession with several phases of play before releasing the ball to the backs. Birdie collected the ball from just outside the 22, sidestepped his opposite man and glided through the gap with Bloxham in close support. A great little chip over the full back, the ball rolled into the goal area only for them to be "pipped at the post" by the defending winger.

Another attack created from the 22 drop out saw Bloxham break through who again was stopped with a crucial tackle a few yards out. Things were looking good. Cleobury cleared their lines and whilst Bloxham dived on the ball the Cleobury no 3 at full tilt jumped onto him, knees first, Bloxham left the pitch after 8 minutes with suspected rib damage (their prop was a complete arse last game too - GR) . On came coach Denver coming out of retirement once again.

Both teams tried to break through each other's defences, but they remained strong until after several phases of play Cleobury forced a try 10 yards to the right of the posts. The conversion attempt started towards the posts but the wind was so strong the ball ended going sideways then back towards the 22, very challenging conditions for even the most competent of kickers.

Half time came & we were 5 nil down, with the slope in our favour but the wind in our faces the battle continued. The first 25 minutes Cleobury had much of the possession but our defence remained strong, both sets of backs used "blitz defence" and thwarted each other's attempts to get the ball wide. Matt Cox had a blinder of a game in both attack & defence. Cleobury used the wind well to turn us around back into our own half. We absorbed the pressure until 15 minutes to go when Cleobury scored from a rolling maul from 15 yards out. Another similar Cleobury try scored with a few minutes to go made the final score-line 17-0. This result flattered the hosts really as there was not much between the 2 sides. A couple of decisions made by the ref in the first half might have changed the outcome of this game.

Sour grapes?

Whilst we should not criticise our referees, this level 2 ref clearly did not have the best of games, some might say he struggled at our level. On another occasion in the first half, Dave Palin broke through several tackles and floated a lovely pass to Jonny Simons who had the line in his sights, Jonny was taken out without the ball and unfortunately the ref missed it. To be honest, the ref got a couple of other decisions wrong which worked in our favour, including not awarding a try to Cleobury for player going into touch when the touch judge who was in perfect position flag had stained down. He conferred with the touch judge who confirmed that the player did not enter touch but his decisions remained.

After the game I was very proud to be part of this great club, our defence was awesome & we did not give in. I would like to pass on my thanks to the following players for making themselves available & putting their bodies on the line, especially those who were called up with such short notice.

Sutton, Morgan, Bayley, Rowe, Gale, Simons, Thorpe, Palin, Higgins, Bird, S Murphy, Cox, Bloxham, B Murphy, Carter & Brookes. Well done to Charlie Johnson, whilst you did not get any game time on this occasion, you made the 1st team squad, keep training & your time will come. A special thanks to veteran Glynn Bennett for coming along as "stand by" and running the line.

Finally, selection for next week's blockbuster against Bloxwich at home will be very difficult. None of the above players deserve to lose their shirt, however we have players with genuine reasons for their unavailability this week that will be considered for selection. The second team are playing Ripley Rhinos at home, I am sure we will give both sides a run for their money.

Onwards & upwards.

As Kev says, next week will see Bloxwich at home and the pressure will be on them. They've not lost a league game all season and will expect to win, but the last time they came to the Holland Park fortress we dumped them out of the Owen cup, so history is on our side.

And Barton are feeling comfortable. The team is gelling well, there is a great spirit, and confidence pours from every pore, much like Carling pours from every pore on Danny's brow on a Sunday morning. When a team is comfortable, the passes flow, there is a back row on every shoulder and the front row hit the rucks just at the right time and just at the right angle. The backs are comfortable with their fancy calls ; their lines of running find gaps, and when Birdy is comfortable with ball in hand we know the kicks will comfortably make touch.

Lee and Wooly comfortably swap positions with no drop in performance, Rachel comforts the wounded players, and the style of play under Kev's training regime is,.... well,..... comfortable.

As I sat in the world's most comfortable sofa in the Tor-Na-Coille hotel this week, comforting a large 10 year old Macallans and some happy memories, a comfortable glow washed over me. Barton are pulling their performances together and the looming 3 team relegation zone is rapidly disappearing in the rear view mirror. The games area a joy to watch and both spectators and newcomers alike are made to feel comfortable in our club. There are smiles on everyone's faces and we are half way through the season with the worst behind us. The dark nights and the disappointments of the first ten games are gone and the sun is rising on a bright Barton day and although we have some tough fixtures ahead I feel comfortable with the new dawn.

But many questions remain ; how many victory fireworks should I import, what whisky should I put in the touchline hip flask and do I need to replenish the curly wurlys ?

Barton 15 - Cannock 10 - 8th January 2011

Birdy's no turkey and bags all the points!

Well a new year, a long break and hopefully not too much over indulgence over Christmas! Could Barton keep up their new found and deserved form to continue their rise up the league table?

A bitterly cold day, sunshine but a very soggy pitch..... a slow start? Not really.... plenty of smash and grab followed by some beefy scrum work from Cannock who seemed to effortlessly push Bars off the ball at will... not a good sign at an early stage... both teams huffed a lot but not the usual back biting and arguing from Cannock (that would come later!).

It was a mistake in the Bars defence with missed tackles which led to Cannock's opening score.... a try on their left, well worked by their backs but the conversion from an easy angle was missed 0-5..

Not a good start after 20 minutes but Bars have a different mindset these days and came back, forced a penalty and Birdy was up for it 3-5 in fact, apart from one miss, Birdy then slotted another over from some distance, which was shortened, i have to add, thanks to Cannock backchat (the cracks were appearing!) 6-5

The referee was having a good game, just as well, he'd travelled all the way from Halifax to officiate and his 'Yorkshire charm'!... was amusing..... "that's crap that is, i'm not avin that!" was one comment he made during the course of play..

Half time, time to regroup and concentrate on the task in hand. Cannock wanted to make it close and were disappointed to see Birdy slot another penalty over 9-5 and the Bars scrum found their feet although they were holding, they never pushed Cannock off the ball in the scrum.

After prolonged pressure from Cannock, Bars managed to work the ball to the 25 and another penalty by some dubious ruck defence and Birdy stepped up yet again..12-5

Bars defence was working hard and working well, they really have upped the effort in that department, but it was just another small mistake, a missed tackle and Cannock sneaked in again with a try, a shame, very cruel, but punished. But Cannock's kicker wasn't of the Bird variety, more turkey!! and missed another conversion 12-10

This is going to be close yet again and Cannock worked hard but Bars had learnt from mistakes and held out until 5 minutes from the end when Cannock were awarded a penalty about 35 metres out.. this could win it for them, but they ain't got no Birdy in their team! kick missed (by a fair margin!) and the crowd oooed and ahhhhd....

So, 2 minutes to go, hold out till the final whistle we all think, hold the ball, waste a bit of time?..... no..... pump the ball up field and chase?.....no! so why not kick a long 22, rip the ball from Cannock in the ruck, move the ball up the pitch to within 35 metres from Cannock's line and get awarded a penalty?.... yes!..... we thought kick for touch is safe?..... no!..... up steps Birdy and slots another one over to make it 15-10 and the final whistle is blown before the ball stops moving..... brilliant.

Another hard fought win, but the team is looking calmer, more organised and defensively stronger... could be a good year 2011? Watch this space!

Market Drayton 17 - Barton 28 - 10th December 2010

It was a long lay off and although not the warmest of days, Barton added to their short winning streak with a good win over our old rivals at Market Drayton.

Despite the two and a half hour journey that saw one car run out of fuel and abandoned on route, Barton turned up ready for what looked on paper to be a tight encounter with last years promoted rivals Market Drayton, the lack of preparation time especially considering four regular first team players were missing from action may have worried some especially as MD looked a tidy well organised outfit pre kick off. However an early try scored by Martin Woolston soon settled any Barton nerves, and when Birdy converted it from tight on the touch line it looked good. Birdy then managed to add a further 3 points with the aid of the upright from a penalty before two controversial decisions took place.

Firstly in an out and out foot race Market Drayton were given the benefit of the doubt when their 10 was adjudged to have grounded the ball before Woolston reached it, and then following a speculative kick despite James Gardner rolling all over the ball the home side were again give the advantage and a try awarded for a MD grounding.

However a smart turn over at a ruck led to a kick to once again but Woolston into full flight a smart dribble over the line saw him fall on the ball for the try.

Barton led comfortably at half time but it was Market Drayton that came out and scored first closing the gap, Barton struggled in the scrums but their work at the breakdown ensure they secured ball, this was taken advantage of in the second half when with secure ball they had options left and right however MD saw the threat and spread their defence to cover unfortunately leaving no one through the middle a simple pick up at the ruck saw Dave Rowe jog unopposed and score one of the simplest tries of his career.

But Market Drayton were not finished yet a further try from their centre saw them still within touching distance, but despite both teams scoring three tries a piece it was the reliable boot of Matt Bird with 13 extra points that made the difference in the end with Barton recording a 17 - 28 win.

Rugeley 20 - Barton 28 - 20th November 2010

Finally ! About time ! But guys, do we have to make such hard work of it ? Very sporting of you all to make a game out of the match but my nerves can't take much more. 18-7 to us at half time and we were in control.

Wooly scored his trademark try ;

Birdy put over a penalty and Thorpey scored another try. Sure Lee scored while their 7 was in the bin for a late tackle on Jamie, but Barton were well in control.

Then the wheels came off and we allowed Rugeley back in the game and with 5 minutes to go we were staring at a 20-18 loss, and no amount of multicoloured sombreros were going to put a smile on our faces.

We had Bloxham on the wing and his touchline jump in an attempt to keep the ball in play was the only light entertainment we had in the second half. High Ten Matt.

The forwards had a good game against a solid Rugeley pack but we still need to be better at producing and defending mauls.

Then we stayed calm, played simple rugby and a nice move from a secure scrum allowed Woolly to do what he does best and score in the corner.

Birdy missed the conversion but time was now our friend. We gathered the kick off and knew there was 40 seconds left and all we needed to do was run the clock down. I don't know why because my genetic makeup means my brain erases anything that causes danger and when someone kicked the ball downfield I nearly had a heart attack - why give away possession ? We don't need territory we just need to run down the clock. Keep it tight in the forwards, put everyone into the ruck because we don't need people out wide, just keep possession and run the clock down. The ball was now in the hands of the Rugeley full back but the Barton chase was on and his kick was charged down by Cliffy's bingo wing and Lee Coton gratefully collected the ball and put it as far into the corner as he could. No-one cared if the conversion was good because we had won.

The touchline tequila tasted good for once and we are on our way.

Barton 32 - Clee Hill 10 - 13th November 2010

It was not clear who was at the bottom of the league and who was at the top after this Saturday's game. Why can't we win ? Apart from the Harborne game, I never felt we have been out classed in any match and would not have felt lucky to come away with a win, and the Clee Hill game was no exception. We should have won but couldn't put it away when we needed to.

I'll let the pictures tell the story. Lee scores ;

Woolly runs ; Confusion in the Clee Hill forwards : Nice line from Pow Pow and nice support but the only way to stop Woolly is to tackle him before he gets the ball...

Barton 32 - Essington 10 (Owen Cup Semi Final) - 6th November 2010

Bill Scroggs not only takes great photos but he writes great match reports too. See here

Well my camera lens has clicked all season so far but Barton as a team have only clicked now and again, not had a lot of luck and not converted the good play with points..... It's been a frustration since the cup game with Bloxwich...

After the narrowest of defeats to Essington in the league a few weeks back one could sense revenge was an added incentive in this cup tie.....best served cold they say.....it was a warm and sunny autumnal day for the spectators but would it be frostier on the pitch??

A good start from Bars, good pressure, good recycling and then a chance penalty for Birdy just 3 minutes in..... and he misses..... was history going to repeat itself?? Surely not!!!

10 minutes in and Essington have a sin bin..... is this our chance? The penalty is wide on the left... we run it but not the panicky tap and go.....it's a training pitch move....with great support and a powerful run and missed tackles Thorpy thunders in a great try under the posts and Birdy converts 7-0

Essington come back at us, but some good spoiling and hardened defence we keep our heads and slowly work the ball out of danger, then Woolly is handed the ball on the halfway line and makes one of those runs

we've all been waiting for.....he breaks at least 4 tackles... even with close support he bags the try for himself and why not....another great try but alas Birdy is not on song and misses the conversion 12-0

This time Essington do come back with intent and despite us holding up a try attempt it's only a matter of time before they score a try after the 15th man comes back on to make up their numbers...the conversion goes over 12-7 so it's going to be tight again we all think??

But no....the clicking really starts....everything that's been promised in the past few league games suddenly starts to work, it's a joy to watch, we win clean lineout, the backs are textbook in their handling, straight purposeful running and Polly sets Murphy up well to score a try..

..a great flowing move 17-7 another missed conversion but not to worry..... on the restart we gradually work our way into their half and Lee....with one of his powering runs, gets into full stride and powers through the centre breaking three tackles and scores under the posts....it's converted and it's 24-7 and it's halftime!!

The second half begins and Essington are going to play ruck and maul towards the try line...it's dull, predictable and in frustration some Bars swearing erupts and the ref isn't having any of it...penalty on our 22 and they kick and score 24-10

It's at this point we tend to lose a bit of focus and worry about "what if?" but today the focus is there and Bars want more....they really do want revenge and it's just got frosty!!!

Another great flowing move from a line out and Woolley dives in to score....erm...on the 5 metre line....whoops ...but in the chaos there's a penalty to us and Birdy works it over 27-10

The Essington ranks are now fuming, arguing and starting to lose it.....they make a fist of it and come back hard again and again the invade our 22 but we hold firm, some fantastic rucking ensues, we concede penalties but they're forced to run, they're short of points, short of time and short of fitness...

Bars clear their lines with some good kicking to a point where we clear midway into their half, we steal the lineout ball, the pack set and drive, Quiddich has time to set himself and release the backs and they oblige.... yet another flowing move from the backs and Woolly makes up for his earlier error and scores an identical try this time over the try line! 32-10.....the conversion is missed but with just 2 minutes left, Essington need a miracle.....

Full time 32-10.....a fantastic first half, a grinding second with moments of brilliance with the killer blows at the end.... a great game to watch.....even better to have played in I imagine.... a good afternoon's work, a real team effort and more please.....

Harborne 46 - Barton 14 - 30th October 2010

Yet again we play well. Yet again we lost. I can't understand it. The Harborne sidelines were amazed that our backs didn't do better as we were "the best Harborne have seen this season".

The scrums were good too and the only problem we had to contend with was the drive before the ball was put in

We were well organised from the kick off and were well drilled in defence too, but we were 22 points down with 25 minutes gone. Then things clicked. A switch with Birdy, a pop to Woolly and there was Jamie on the loop to make the extra man - I mean even their winger was never going to stop three of them.

Birdy converted

The Harborne backs were beautiful to watch as they linked wonderfully together and their inside centre was a pain in the arse all day. Our backs were every bit as impressive but couldn't rack up the points the way Harborne did. However five minutes later and Jamie dummys a pop to Birdy (they bought it) dummied a pop to Wolly (they bought it) and ran round unfettered for a nice try.

Birdy converted and it was 22-14. Despite having the brains and the beauty of Liz Locke from the Apprentice, we couldn't match her score this week and Birdy's conversion was the end of Barton's points tally.

But our forwards played well. Jonny loves contact and here he is taking on their number 8 and then their number seven but yet again that number 12 is around.

Craig, Jonny Sutton and Cliffy did a great job in the front row and Brooksy filled in admirably when Jonny went off. Dave Grosvenor and Malcolm locked down well but their opposite numbers were extremely mobile and disrupted a lot of our play.

James Thorpe and Dave Rowe lost one lineout all day and showed that our set pieces are now secure and the options are available for full play. Martyn Bentley came on for Malcolm and always took a direct line, but the Harborne pack were well drilled at the breakdown and a tussle for possession was always on the cards.

But I was impressed with the backs. Normally I'd see Birdy as either an out and out winger or stand off, while Jamie has the crash mentality of an inside centre but today they swapped places; and it worked magnificently. Birdy's cut on the switch in the last quarter of the game had everyone gasping as he took on the full back. Lovely lines and with Wolly also taking straight lines, Jamie had enough space in the corners to get the Murphy twins into action. It was great.

Knighty filled in at Full back and seemed to be everywhere, and the Ollie (more or a scrum half) came on for Wolly and became acquainted with their number 12.

The Murphy twins patrolled the wings and showed their speed and their fellow backs how to tackle properly - this is how its done. Any Questions ?

To be fair, everyone had a good game. Unfortunately for Barton this Saturday, having a good game is not enough against a team like Harborne when the click like they did. We were pleased with the way we played and the way we linked to together and go into this weekend's Cup semi-final with Essington with a sense of confidence and purpose. We were not pleased with the lack of club ties and the lack of sausage and chips in the Harborne clubhouse, but even that can't dampen our mood as we roll on to the Owen Cup final.

We are praying for a good game;

Bring it on !

Barton 15 - Essington 16 - 23rd October 2010

The Essington Enigma.

Every team that comes to Barton can't understand why we play so well yet can't seal the victories. I feel the same.

I mean the lineouts worked well with Rowe and Morgan working well together ;

We pushed them off their ball on more than one occasion in the scrums despite the slippery surface ;and we stuck together as a team;

Craig Hudson was harshly sin binned for going over the top at a ruck in front of our posts and to be fair, he had gone into the ruck at his normal angle, but had been hit from behind and driven over the top. Naturally he flapped at the ball which prompted the yellow card. Essington scored the penalty and a converted try while he was resting, but here is the irony ; we scored too despite being a man down. Jonny Simons dived over for the points ;

but Birdy was cruelly denied the conversion by the paint on the posts.

He got a penalty though and we wandered through the game, always trailing slightly. But what a game.

Giles came on for an exhausted Moule, but when his calf went pop, Gary had to put down the hip flask and get back on for the last 15 minutes. Dave Palin came off to allow Malcolm Gale to make an exhibition of himself on the pitch. While everyone else was dirty you could see how much ground the old lock covered in his perfect Persil whites - a shining beacon of the team. It was a lovely team but so frustrating to watch because how can we not win when we have people like Pow Pow charging everywhere, with big Dave Palin on his inside shoulder ? Just look at the space and the centres in support ;

Here he is with the ever present James Thorpe going in to help Captain Lee Coton, and you know which side the ball will come out of in this contest.

Cliffy was also on the charge; here he is in the first 2 minutes again with Dave Palin for company, unlucky not to score ;

Matt Knight liked the number 9 position and linked well with Birdy and his big number 8 partner. I mean who would want to be wearing that number 10 shirt just now ?

Wooly also showed how to step inside and take a tackle or two, or three, or is that four Essington defenders absorbed ?

You can always count on the Murphy wingers to keep the outer channels patrolled and they were always there, always safe and secure, and always looking for their full back and centres.

The game itself though was heartbreaking but the last twenty minutes brought a lump to my throat as we threw everything at Essington - great composure, fantastic support and finally full back Jamie Maxwell scored in the corner with applauding friends

Birdy kicked an amazing touchline conversion

but it was not enough and it was the cruel post that kept the points out of Barton's grasp.

The only time we have beaten Essington was in the Owen Cup semi final two years ago.

On November 6th we see them (again), at home in the Owen Cup semi final (again), and this time we will win - again.

Bloxwich 55 - Barton 3 - 9th October 2010

Beaten by a better side. We could say we didn't have our Captain Jonny Simons, or our Vice Captain Matt Bayley or the Vice vice Captain Lee Coton because of injury, and we could say that we were also missing Birdy at 10, Wooly at 13 and Tabs at 8 but that would be sour grapes. Bloxwich were good today and they're not top of the league for nothing.

Things started well. We ran some great phases from the kick off and got a penalty in their 22 in front of the posts within a few minutes and Jamie slotted it over nicely. It was downhill from there.

Bloxwich dominated the scrums and we rarely retained possession as they drove and wheeled our scrums at will. Our lineouts and other set pieces worked well and it was clear our backs were never going to be beaten unless hopelessly outnumbered ; which they often were. The Bloxwich number 8 dominated the forward drives and kicked most of his penalties and conversions this game, and we were glad someone was controlling the game as it certainly wasn't the referee. There were three yellow cards in the game; two of which were a bit harsh and one which should have been a straight red but interpretation of the laws is everything and this stretched to the lineouts where by the time the second half wandered round, you could put as many or as few people into the lineout as you wished. Unusual but we still won our ball.

Jamie Maxwell ran a lot of the ball today but mainly because he didn't have an organised back line due to disruption caused in open play ;

We always saw Pow Pow looking for contact ; And we always saw the impressive Den Jackson hanging off looking for someone to run at ; Sometimes it was a little confused ;and sometimes we got to run our training ground moves ; and it may not have clicked as well as we would have liked but as Cliffy shows, you always know you've got your friends around you when it matters and as many of the pictures show, Cliffy and Tom hunt in packs. ;

Ollie Melodini had a good game at full back despite being played into the corners too often, but his tackling was secure and he's a welcome addition to the club (and according to the pack so is his sister).

Matt Perkins stepped up into the centres and tackled as well as you know he does but got a scrum half's boot in the back just after we'd used all our subs. He understood and played on manfully. Dave Ryder ran about on the wing and when a tackle was needed, he had a variety of black and green shirted players to chose from as he faced many an overlap situation. It was 26-3 at half time and late on in the second half Pow Pow got sin binned harshly for pulling down a ruck and then we saw some niggles get into the game. It didn't need to but the ref failed to control this side of the game and the Bloxwich winger rested for ten minutes for throwing a punch that the ref saw (and subsequently demonstrated), and a few minutes later Jamie got sin binned for not throwing a punch when he should have.

Someone everybody wanted to punch was the Bloxwich scrum half. Now I know scrum halves are not yet in the Rodent category and cannot be bludgeoned to death under the guise of pest control but surely the authorities have to reconsider their classification after Saturday's evidence. Even the daft Welshman wandering up and down the touch line, thinking that "behind the rope" meant anywhere on the pitch up to the 15 yard markers, dropped his partisan extremist views for a second and concurred that the Bloxwich 9 was "a twat of the highest order".

But that's okay as we played on. Jonny Sutton came off with a damaged shoulder and Adam Brookes came on to help our scrummaging efforts. Malcolm came on for Dave Palin and Martyn Bentley came on for James Thorpe near the end of the game. All had played really well but Dave Palin's Testicle issues and Rachel's reluctance to provide secondary care meant he had to come off. Thorpe had another good game and Martyn relished the rumbling runs into the Bloxwich three quarters almost as much as the spectators did.

So in the end we lost to a better team.

But let's look at the record. We've played Bloxwich away twice in the last two years and lost 55-3 and 30-0. Not a good record, but at fortress Holland Park the record is very different; a tight 5-3 loss in January 2009 and a 10-3 win last month. They can definitely be beaten by us at home.

I can draw positives about the way Barton played today and I know that Bloxwich don't travel well so our game in January will be a very different affair. Rest up for a week guys and let's prepare for Essington at home in a fortnight.

Barton 10 - Cleobury Mortimer 26 - 2nd October 2010

Another hard day at the office for a strong Barton side. Cleobury have always brought out a strong forward unit and a tidy set of backs but today wing man Manners and his double digit cohorts in the backs had a quiet time of it.

We learnt a lot over the last few weeks. We needed to sort out our lineouts - Check.

Birdy needed to kick straight - Check.

The scrums needed to be effective - Check.

Barton set the scene early with a solid functioning lineout and with a strong boot from Bird we were able to control territory and possession, and for the first ten minutes we held the scrums too. We pressured well and the first half was excellent.

What we were not prepared for was the "step and wheel" tactic in the Cleobury scrum which reversed possession far too often, but ultimately it was the mauling game that won Cleobury their points.

It was a lesson in the old dark arts really. One part of their game plan (many on the touchline thought it was the only part of their game plan) was to hold the ball up in the tackle or at the lineout and start mauling. It was good to watch from the sidelines as the ball was very (and I mean very) quickly moved to the back, they waited until everyone was in position and with low body positions walked us all over the park. I would not have liked being a Barton forward facing such energy sapping tactics. Cleobury were able to disrupt at every breakdown and in some rare cases this was done legally. Here we see two Cleobury players entering the side of a ruck ; one from each side in a move synchronized to confuse officials.

Our front row worked well and Jonny Sutton played very well in the loose and in the tight and I'm not just saying this because he sponsored the Match Ball. Cliffy's throwing was straight and true and Bayley kept the squeeze on a strop number 3. The Cleobury second row may as well have stayed on the minibus because they were so late to tackles that they flew over the top long after the ball had gone and kept knocking over our players off the ball. You may suggest this was deliberate but I couldn't possibly comment. Dave Palin, Dave Rowe and Martyn Bentley were involved in a lot of the loose play but the Cleobury rucking techniques meant Quidditch got poor ball all day long. The difference was in the flankers are ours were light and fast whilst theirs were slow and cynical. Thorpe and Pryce were strong defensively and in attack came into the line at speed knowing they had Bayley and Morgan on their shoulder.

The niggle from the Shropshire farmers was getting a little old and eventually we saw Quidditch square up to his opposite number after he had infringed and got away with it just one time too many.

The Cleobury number three was on the wing and waved his girly gloved hands in the air remonstrating with the referee that he must have seen such a shocking event, and then ran into the melee to go nose to nose with Lee Coton. This went to show how stupid props can be and in the end the referee calmed things down by yellow carding two innocent players. It was a clever move as a puzzled Cleobury pack stood and contemplated the decision - "why did he card him ? you should have gone off you tosser". From the sidelines we couldn't tell which tosser the captain was referring to and to be fair there were a number of candidates.

Manners wasn't one of them. Their winger gave us a torrid time last season but today he was very quiet (lack of scrum cap perhaps ?) and this could have been due to the early loss of their stand off although the inside centre stepped up and had quite a good game. Our backs were more than a match for the rearranged Cleobury side and we saw Neil Forden take crash balls through the gain line knowing a grateful set of forward would be there. Lee Coton made sure that nothing came through the middle and Murphy and Woolston made sure they didn't go round the outside either.

The Barton try when it came was a thing of beauty. We all knew what was going to happen, just like in 2003 in Sydney. A lineout. Thorpe collects beautifully and taps off the top to Quidditch. Birdy runs and drifts finding Matt Perkins joining the line from full back, hard and straight. Through one tackle, drawing the winger, ball in both hands into the next tackle and pop outside to Birdy who had continued his loop. A straightening of the line (yes he did !) stands up the full back, and with perfect timing Wooly receives the ball for a canter over the line with only the blindside winger for company. It was perfect, and as the touchline crowd applauded Birdy kicked the conversion to make it 7-0. No-one in our league could put a set of moves like that together, even in practice.

Cleobury came back and were awarded a penalty 5 yards out in front of our posts after a period of hard rucking and mauling. We thought they would kick it but as we drifted back behind the line, their outside centre took a quick tap and dived over. 7-7 after the conversion. Sucker punch. Tap penalties are the subject of much controversy and such was the furore about Rowie taking one that even the Cleobury players felt the need to step in and stop him;

In the second half they continued their game plan and using the same old mauling tactic scored another goal and they were 14-7 up. Birdy pulled back a penalty and for much of the second half it was 14-10 with everything to play for. Brookes came on for Jonny Sutton and Dean Fradgley replaced Dave Palin and the hard work continued. A fortunate try in the corner put them 21-10 in the lead and the Barton side were tired and saw a looming defeat. This was compounded by a fourth unconverted try giving Cleobury a flattering result.

So our lineouts are back, Birdy's kicking is good and the backs link well. Defensively we were very strong except for the mauling game where too many players were dragged in to stop the drive, leaving gaps elsewhere. We've got until January to practice mauling and anti-mauling technique as we know that when we do, we can beat them.

Overall I think Cleobury deserved to win, simply because they dominated our scrums and gave us a lesson in mauling, but as rugby players they don't have a patch on the Barton team in terms of skills or fitness. We cannot match them for stupidity (especially their number 3 who in the last 5 minutes felt he needed to pick on Birdy - he quickly dropped the idea when Wooly walked over to point out the error of his ways), but that would be too much to ask.

Pinley 39 - Barton 28 - 25th September 2010

We're waiting for the full match report but the upshot is that we are out of the Junior Vase competition. Lee Coton scored and was sin binned (not at the same time), Wooly scored another try, as did Dean Jackson and so did Dave Palin. Birdy kicked all the conversions.

But we scored ! We scored nearly as many points in this game as we have in the whole of the last three (29 points) so if we can run up 28 points against this kind of opposition and repeat the performance for the rest of the season we will have a fine time.

Cannock 16 - Barton 9 - 18th September 2010

This was a tight game. Playing uphill with a light pack against a big Cannock tight five was never going to be the easiest 40 minutes of your life, and the assembled travelling party settled down to a half of damage limitation, knowing our fitness and youth advantage would win us the second half.

We know the Cannock backs have Wendell on the wing (4 tries against us in 2008) and.....well that's about it. Their standoff plays deep and apart from passing and kicking he doesn't run and stays well out of the defensive game, and our Birdy knew this well. First ball and Birdy ghosts past him and 20 yards later is brought down, Cannock are offside at the ensuing ruck and Birdy converts the penalty.



Lovely kick, confident start and we're off again.

Cannock are known for their physical "application" at the breakdown and here is a lovely shot of Simon happily coming round the ruck illegally and stamping on a Barton player. Again.



What I like about this photo is that it was late in the first half - after Simon had been sin binned for, well, exactly the same offence. Leopards. Spots.

Their big inside centre tried similar tactics and the referee applied a similar colour card and for 8 minutes we were two men up. Sadly we did not convert this advantage to high points although Birdy did manage to put over another beautiful penalty kick which caused some concern in the Cannock coaching team as they were not used to such a high conversion rate from penalties on their windy, sloping pitch. The frustrating part of this 15 minute period when we were one or two men up was the Cannock number 8 rounding Ben on the wing with a vicious hand off and scoring in the corner. Craig Jackson came very close after being set up nicely by Wooly but a desperate try saving tackle kept the Cannock try line unbroken.





With a few more years experience under his belt Craig will clinically finish these off. Despite all the pressure in the Cannock 22 we could not score and unfortunately our pack had a hard day.

We had Sam and James on the flanks and although not as big as your normal forwards they showed everyone how to play and gave another lesson in Barton's "Masterclass in Tackling" course.



Such is the interest in this course that we have now launched an NVQ level II qualification (available at Burton College) and a short film that will be aired on Sky sports 3 next spring. Please see Matt Bayley for details.

The whistle went and the first half ended. We were 6-5 up, we were all fit and ready to play downhill with a slight breeze. A little buzz ran round the spectators and players alike and we settled down for the second half. The ball went up and Malcolm took it on the charge and we were back in their half. Game on. Then the skies clouded over, the rain fell and so did our advantage.

The scrums did not all go our way although in the first few we pushed Cannock back, and I was optimistic about the afternoon but as time wore on we could see the sheer bulk of our opposition would be a problem and even with Rachel getting in between the ref and the scrum half we lost a few against the head.



The lineouts were a bit hit and miss and Captain Lee had some tough decisions at penalty time - do we call a scrum and tie in their players knowing we have an extra man outside, but run the risk of losing possession to a heavier pack ? Do we kick for touch and hope the lineout fires well or do we try to keep up with Dave Rowe who's already taken the quick tap and headed off downfield ?. Decisions decisions.



Defensively, we were very strong. (Nice lines but everyone should be counting their men, not just Woolly);



Notice how well we set up; very few people committed to the ruck once the ruck was called (how many Barton players are out of the game ? - very few compared to Cannock). The drift worked well and first up tackles were always made ;



and we played well as a team. Tactically we put Ben Murphy up against Wendell and on a couple of occasions Murph blew by him, and kept the talismanic winger quiet for 78 minutes. Good job. Birdy slotted another penalty and so did Cannock. 9-8. The clock ticked down. Matt Perkins and Craig Jackson ran the ball back

into traffic with aplomb, and always found Jonny Sutton, big brother Dean and Matt Bayley in attendance.



The breakdowns were never complete without Cliffy but with his new modern haircut it's hard to find him.



Time dragged on and Dean Fradgley came on for Malcolm and young Adam Brookes replaced a tireless Jonny Sutton in the front row and we played on. Birdy continued to shine and came very close to scoring in the far corner after some strong running by Lee Coton and Wooly, but was denied by a triple combo of 11,14 and 15 taking him into touch.

Unbelievably Cannock kept alive and managed to clear their lines with messy, panicked clearances that were not pretty but effective. And that summed up the last ten minutes. Dean Jackson was deemed to have fringed

a ruck once too often and was yellow carded, and Cannock put over the penalty - 11-9 to them. Two minutes later and an audacious penalty kick by our onform standoff drifted slightly wide but I did overhear the Cannock coach say that no-one had made a penalty from that far out "but this twat might". That's right, he's our twat ! We were building ourselves up for a finale like the Eccelshall game last year. And then the cruel blow came.

We had been defending in our 5 yard area from a barrage of pick and drives from the huge Cannock pack, and had snuffed out each one, but this had generated a massive overlap to the right. They chose to go left and everyone in blue and yellow whined and moaned until Wendell decided to dance and prance and touched down in the corner. The conversion was missed and so was any extra time and a tough day at the office came to an end.

The team played well against a strong, experienced pack and despite a narrow half time lead we came away losers. But wait a minute. Seventeen Bartonians took to the field on Saturday and eight have never played Cannock, or league Rugby for Barton before. The team is young, fresh, skilful and unfeasibly fit, and all that is missing is game time as a team. This will come, as will the wins, as will the league title.

So well done to Cannock. Eccleshall only lost one game during the whole of last season against a Birdy led Barton, and now you can look back on Saturday as being the only team to beat Barton in 2010/2011.

Barton 10 - Bloxwich 3 4th September 2010



Barton's 3rd team cricketers lobby hard and our season opener had to be played on the wide open fields of John Taylor High School. I was worried when I arrived and felt butterflies in my stomach just before the whistle but in the end it was okay. I wasn't worried at all about the team ; we had practiced hard all summer, had a

great squad to pick from and were fit, full of enthusiasm, and flair. I was worried because Bill Scroggs was late and I might have to take the match photos myself.

There was a big crowd and as everyone filled the near side we had spectators shoulder to shoulder from try line to try line and it looked awesome from the far side. Both sides started a little nervously, as both Captains eyed up the referee to see how he would interpret the new laws, and it soon became clear that "activities" at the breakdown would be quickly penalised. This is fine because Kev and Tony had drilled this into us and we were prepared, and we kept possession more often than not, when in previous seasons we would have been turned over. Some sideline critics said this was due to the introduction of Adam Brookes and Dean Jackson who entered every ruck and maul with intent, but I'll settle for a combination of both. The newcomers certainly showed promise. James Thorpe was everywhere and gave a lovely display of tackling for 80 minutes, and his fellow back row were never far behind. Andy Gillett continued his transformation and had a sterling game at number eight, earning no yellow cards, no warnings and I think only one penalty. This made us other 40+ years olds look shamefully at the floor.

Quidditch and Birdy linked well and the Bloxwich stand in scrum half wished he hadn't, as he was harried all afternoon by our dickhead of 2009/10. Birdy never runs straight and receives relentless abuse for wasting the overlaps carefully crafted by our forwards and on Saturday he decided to take on his critics and on two beautiful occasions he took the inside line and made some lovely breaks. Louie and Lee were always with him and the centre partnership had a good day. Birdy didn't. His (and everyone's kicking) was poor and only one penalty kick was made all game, despite seven attempts from Bloxwich. Birdy also didn't have the luxury of kicking penalties for touch as our lineouts were shocking and the objective of penalties in your own half (keep possession and gain territory) meant you had to tap and go every time - Rowie of course loved this. I'm not sure what caused our lineout issues but we only won one out of the first eight half and that was a scrappy affair where Bloxwich didn't even compete for the ball. In the second half we gained some composure and started to fire on more cylinders but it was still a spluttering, banging affair pretty much like the engine in an old 1600E Cortina I once owned.

Matt Bayley came off late in the first half and we watched his knee inflate slowly like one of those "special" implants people talk about. The thinning effect of alcohol didn't seem to help this either. Before all this drama we saw some lovely breaks from the centres and Lee Coton soon found himself in acres of space just inside their half. He darted left and right but eventually saw where the cameraman was and made a beeline for Bill Scroggs, touching down a try with a flourish that I'm sure he's practiced privately at home on many occasions.



With an earlier Bloxwich penalty we were 5-3 up and the game dragged on.

As you would expect from Barton flankers, Pow Pow loved carrying the ball and like Louie Whiting, always soaked up an extra man in contact, making space (somewhere) for us to exploit. As the team gains match experience we'll see more offloads from both of these guys as the team spots the space around the initial contact that we can see frustratingly from the touchline. Alternately we'll see good protection of the ball and quick recycling like the Under 13s are learning on Sunday mornings. Sure, there are times when we go into contact and can't turn and present the ball and a massive wrestling match ensues, but you can see in training that we are looking to pass or protect, and avoid the arm contorting kerfuffle that looks like a cash strapped blood-sugar-crisis teenager trying to get the last green Aero out of a vending machine. The building blocks are there and the design looks great and with the likes of Clifffy, Thorpe, Rowe and the likes on your shoulder, we will see many, many hard yards being made.

There was a lot of ground covered by both teams and plenty of breaks from the backs but both teams had excellent defensive structures and it was clear no-one was getting past the back three of Murphy, Perkins and Woolston. Murphy had a great game and we should have put the ball his way more as he was lined up against a winger with both my age and skill so it was a poor match but we didn't exploit it fully. Woolly had a fast nippy guy on his side who was the favoured recipient of Bloxwich ball but Big Martin stayed calm and well positioned and kept him in check all 80 minutes.

Birdy's day got worse when he got a ding on his little finger and split the back of his hand, but Jamie Maxwell came on and changed the tempo of the game. Apart from a little nigggle with their full back and a silly penalty for blocking, Jamie slowed down our attack and brought the back row into first phase play a lot more. As Bloxwich were getting tired this was probably a good tactic anyway, and our rolling rucking strategy made plenty of space out wide which we started to use a lot more.



Eventually on a green ball call Jamie put in a crossfield kick that bounced kindly for Woolly who went in to score an "easy" try, but as I pointed out to the assembled crowd, it was only easy if you were able to run to the ball after 75 minutes of running after others.



Overall a great result against tough opposition who we will see later this year in league games. We were lucky Bloxwich didn't convert their kicks, but Bloxwich were lucky we didn't win our own lineouts, so all in all a fair score and a good reflection of the work that the boys have put in this summer.

The first in our Series of Master Classes

Master Class in Tackling - Part I - Pow Pow



Master Class in Tackling - Part II - Lee Coton (hit low drive up)



Master Class in Tackling - Part III - Lee Coton (wrap them up)



Barton as a Team - Examples of how to do it

Barton as a team - awareness at penalty time



Barton as a team - facing down the opposition (where's the opposition ?)



Barton as a team - Supporting the tackler (where's the opposition ?)



Barton as a team - Supporting the ball carrier (where's the opposition ?)



Barton as a team - Supporting the runner (where's the opposition ?)



Barton as a team - Barton as a TEAM !!! (where's the opposition ?)



Rolls Royce 3 - Barton 10

"Take it easy" they said. "We've got four new players out of twenty tonight". I counted the swarming mass of Bartonians as they rocked and reeled in their warm up routine. "We've got eleven new players from twenty eight" I said. "Okay you win" was the reply ; and we did.

Kev and Tony have done a great job over the summer. Despite lots of new people, others playing out of position and others coming back after a few years break, the team were cohesive, calm and supportive. It brought a tear to the eye to see discipline at the breakdown, organised lines of running and thoughtful support

play. There was no bickering, no tantrums, and no heavy sighs at the knock-ons. And there were a few, as the ball and the pitch were nicely greased up after a heavy shower and a hot summer.

Rolls Royce is always a great season opener for both teams. Royces are a great bunch of guys who enjoy the game for the same reasons we do and who see the mid-week opener as a chance to blood the new recruits knowing they are not immediately thrown into the Lion's den and that we won't abuse the poor wee souls. Same for us.

I don't know all the new players' names yet and so I can't mention any specifically but it was great to see such a measured performance from people who clearly know and love our great sport, and will fit well into our club. The training has helped them understand how people are likely to play but until you are in the big wide open savannah of South Derby with real competition instead of some bibbed interloper teammate, you don't really know how they are going to behave.

The referee was quite tough at the breakdown and I guess that reflects the modern game where you have a fraction of a second to compete for the ball and then have to leave it, the player, and any thoughts of wandering offside, alone. That is unless you are Ritchie McCaw who seems to tackle, get to his feet, move to an onside position, compete for the ball, rip it out, pass to Weepu and move onto the next phase before the opposition player has even hit the deck. I predict that our success this year will depend on our ability to secure quick ball at our breakdowns, and to commit as few players to an opposing ruck as possible - think "Ritchie".

Wednesday was not a bad start and most of the "over the top / sealing off" penalties were a combination of overzealous driving into a ruck and a lack of resistance from Royces. It'll come though. What did unnerve me was the way we created space through hard work but quickly gave it all back by drifting and running diagonally instead of hard and straight. Louis at inside centre will scare everyone in our league and if he maintains the hard straight line into contact, there will always be space created as he always had the close attention of two opposing players. Woolly at 13 and the openside flanker should be tracking Louis at the gain line like ramoras on the great white sharks, and we'll see some fantastic breaks, as we all know fullbacks at this level play very deep.

We did create space outside but did not use it very well. When Woolly scored his try we had set up a nice ruck on their 5 yard line and we had two left and everyone right. Royces had four or five guys to our left so a quick headcount would have shown acres of space out right. Fortunately for us a long miss pass to Woolly on the left gave the big man space to run in, although the teeless conversion was missed. When space was created outside the lack of match practice showed how difficult it was to retain it ; here is Paul Betts taking the ball on the tramline and being shepherded into touch.

You can see that there is still room (and support) inside so the potential is there but just like learning to juggle, unless you practice again and again you can't get the simple timing right, yet when it does click you wonder what all the stress and strain was about.

Anyway enough of the analysis. A good crowd turned up and saw Birdy dot over in the corner after a steady set of well drilled phases, and for most of the game the score was 5-3. Gillett showed a maturing as he only had one snipe at the ref, gave away a small handful of penalties, and ran to keep up with Sam Murphy and Ali Pryce which you could argue at his age is foolish rather than mature, but he was there.

We were playing four 20 minute quarters and Kev mixed it all up nicely. We saw Jody at scrum half and Goodhead at inside centre for a while and Goodhead's tackle on a thundering Royce Hooker made me want to marry him on 11th instead. To be fair, all our tackling was very good and the majority of the tackles were of the textbook variety and hence effective. Woolly made it 10-3 and both sides could have scored more if they were less rusty but again that's what this game is all about.

So our season is underway and I welcome the new influx of players and the new style of play. I'm optimistic especially as the biggest threat to Barton's Rugby glory (the persistence of summer) has now gone.