

**Sunday 4th March 2019**

## **Bristol and West 7 Ancient Britons 2**

ABs assembled for the traditional season opener down in the West Country with a squad of 14 players ready to take on a Bristol & West side who were preparing ahead of their appearance in the National over 50s finals weekend at Lea Valley in May. The AB squad was again pleased to enjoy the pre-match coffee and doughnuts hospitality courtesy of **Merv and Sue Adams**. Suitably refreshed the squad made its way to the pitch in warm, dry conditions.

**Captain Baron** announced his game plan to the squad and delegated off field management of the team to **Coach Kendall** who was side-lined through injury, thereby shrewdly setting up a scapegoat in the event of defeat. With a considerable age gap between the ABs squad and the opposition it was going to be a tough afternoon to match the younger Bristol legs.

The first quarter saw the Ancient Britons make the early running dominating possession and territory. When Bristol did counter their first incursion was well repelled by **German Singh**. It was however a sign of things to come and Bristol put together 3 or 4 very dangerous moves. The defence held firm however with good tackling from **Paramjit Hayre and Mike Handley** meaning **Merv Adams** was relatively untroubled in the AB goal. It was therefore somewhat against the run of play when the Ancient Britons took the lead on 12 minutes – a well-crafted move down the left involving **Mike Handley, Bruce Baron, Brian Hopkins and Trevor Denison** caused some consternation across the Bristol backline and when **Brian** challenged the Bristol keeper for a loose ball he was able to touch it to **Trevor** who confidently struck home from close range. This provoked an immediate response from Bristol and within three minutes they had not only equalised but taken the lead. The first goal coming when an AB hit out was picked up and moved quickly into the circle for a shot that gave **Merv** no chance. Then within a minute a swift counter attack left the AB defence outnumbered and the Bristol right wing with a simple far post tap in.

After a few positive words from the **Captain**, the second quarter began. ABs were still assured of their touch and patterns of play and some nice moves down the right from **Messrs Hopkins and Woodward** brought some pressure to bear even if clear cut chances were still at a premium. In a very open passage of play Bristol also created chances and **Steve Taylor** made one particularly notable interception when a goal seemed certain. Nevertheless the threat was building and from their next foray Bristol struck a post only for the rebound to fall kindly to the centre forward who made no mistake with a powerful shot on the turn. Ancient Britons responded well, **Paul Woodward** forced a penalty corner from a dribble into the circle and although **German's** shot was saved, from the ensuing long corner a nice move between **Richard, Trevor and Paul** worked the ball to **Steve Taylor** whose shot was also saved.

As the second quarter drew to a close Bristol regained control of the game and a loose ball at the top of the circle was driven powerfully into the corner of the net. There was still time for a good cross from **Trevor** which **Sukhdev** could not quite convert and at the other end for **Steve Taylor** to make an important intervention to prevent a fifth Bristol goal.

HALF TIME: BRISTOL & WEST 4 ANCIENT BRITONS 1

Despite being behind the consensus at half time was the side was playing well and coping with the 'age gap'. Chances had been made and the side was certain more would continue to be made.

The third quarter proved to be the best of the match for the Ancient Britons. They were the first side into their stride and some early pressure saw Bristol concede a penalty corner. The routine was a simple but very effective direct strike from **German**. His initial shot was saved but the ball fell to him on the rebound and he made no mistake to reduce the arrears to 4-2. The Bristol goal was now coming under increasing threat and a melee in the circle saw **Brian Hopkins** force a save from the Bristol keeper. Shortly after a nice move down the right hand side involving **David Read and Mike Christie** saw the ball crossed to **Paul Woodward**, whose first time shot went narrowly wide. ABs were finding energy from somewhere and next it was a left sided move started from **Sukhdev** and worked through **Paramjit** to **Brian** in the circle. His effort on goal was well saved by the Bristol keeper. The third quarter ended shortly after with the Ancient Britons still 2 goals adrift but having played some very entertaining attacking hockey throughout the period.

The final quarter started in a similar vein to the third. In the opening minute **Bruce, Trevor and Brian** combined to create a chance for **Mike** but his shot was saved and from the fast break that followed Bristol forced a short corner which was not dealt with by the AB defence and a scrappy fifth goal was the outcome. The game was now very open and stretched but with ABs having to chase the game the team became increasingly exposed at the back. It was therefore no surprise when Bristol went further ahead from a swift counter attack after an AB move had broken down deep in the Bristol half. A seventh goal was conceded shortly after following a communication breakdown in the AB defence which allowed the Bristol centre forward to nip in and push the ball past the ABs keeper.

Still the AB side refused to give up and immediately from the restart went back on the attack. This brought instant success when the ball was worked wide down the left hand side. The **two Mikes** and **Steve** created an opening for **Trevor** but again the Bristol defence was resolute and blocked his goal-bound shot.

With time running out ABs continued to throw everything forward but there was to be no more goals and Bristol ran out deserved winners. ABs were left to rue the passages of play where they conceded goals quickly as for the vast majority of the game they had competed admirably against younger, fitter opposition.

In summary, an excellent game between two competitive sides. In true AB tradition it was a fine team effort with every team member playing his part. Trying to pick a stand out player was difficult but the Man of the Match verdict went to **Steve Taylor** for his timely interceptions and tackling shown throughout the afternoon in midfield and defence.

The squad retired to the nearby clubhouse to dissect the afternoon's event, blame it all on **Clive's** management and enjoy Bristol's hospitality with a promise to return next year and reverse the result.

**Mervyn Adams, Brian Hopkins, Paramjit Hayre, Mike Christie, Sukhdev Dhesi, Bruce Baron (Captain), David Read, Steve Taylor, Mike Handley, Trevor Denison, Richard Turner, Nirmal Singh, German Singh & Paul Woodward.**

**Supporter – Sue Adams**