

Stafford XV 31-17 Shrewsbury

23rd January 2010

Midlands West 2 (NORTH) League Fixture

Stafford took to the field full of confidence after last week's performance and also two successful coaching sessions during the week. They certainly took the game to Shrewsbury, retaining possession in open play and stretching the opposition at every opportunity. Following one such sustained attacking period of play, after both Ollie Greatholder and Tom Smith had made strong incursions into the Shrewsbury defence, it was Johnny Watson-Jones who was in support to score the first try, successfully converted by Tom Hodgkison. Stafford continued to dominate set-piece play which gave the backs a steady supply of controlled ball with which to continue to attack what was turning out to be a resolute Shrewsbury defence. Stuart Lewis was particularly dominant and was causing the opposing defence problems all afternoon with his strong angled running and solid defence. Towards half time though, Stafford were over-eager at the breakdown on a couple of occasions which resulted in Shrewsbury coming back into the game and being awarded a stream of penalties. One of these resulted in Shrewsbury scoring a deserved three points and also Stafford losing a player to the sin-bin for persistent infringements.

The second half saw Stafford receive the ball from the kick off and, despite being down to 14 players, totally dominate the opposition in all aspects of play. From a tactical kick by Hodgkinson, Lewis was on hand to follow up a score a try. It was all Stafford at this point, especially as they were back up to fifteen players and following a superb drive by the forwards, it was Smith who was in support and scored Stafford's third try. Straight from the kick, Stafford mounted another series of attacks on the now flagging Shrewsbury defence and an excellently executed forward driving maul resulted in Richard Whatling crashing over for the second week in succession. Despite Stafford making a couple of tactical substitutions, the cohesion of the team remained in place and from a loose kick out of defence by Shrewsbury, Ross Donovan gathered the ball and drove straight through the opposition defence to score Stafford's fifth try, again converted by Hodgkinson. Stafford went down to fourteen men for the last ten minutes of the match following an unlucky clash of heads between two of its own players when thwarting a Shrewsbury attack. All credit must go to Shrewsbury who suddenly found another gear and dominated possession for this period, their No 8 especially to the fore, and this pressure resulted in them scoring two late converted tries.

Overall, a well deserved win for the home team and much needed points as a result but credit must be also go to Shrewsbury who never gave up throughout the whole game and contributed fully to an entertaining contest. Stafford rise to ninth in the league and face tenth position Wolverhampton on Saturday.