**Match Report**

**Jason Leonard U20 National County Championship**

**Hertfordshire 31 Kent 29**

**Both teams went into the match, played at Cheshunt RFC, unbeaten and were playing for a home advantage in the National quarter-final.**

**Kent had made eight changes from the side that had defeated Sussex in the previous round so the match was also a test of the squad’s strength in depth.**

**The match kicked off and it was Kent who were first on the board. They attacked the blindside and winger Aaron Grandidier was on hand to finish sharply following good work from Sean Beckett, Chris Annous and Brendon Paulsen. The conversion into the wind was missed.**

**Herts came back strongly and good driving play saw them eventually breach the Kent line twice in quick quick succession. Scrum half Sparks and lock Clark were the scorers. Both tries were converted by Bouchier for the home side to lead 14-5.**

**The match progressed in difficult playing conditions with rain and hail coming down at times but the players persevered and served up some end to end rugby. Beard and Beckett winning breakdown ball combined with Colegate and Wilkins doing an admirable job with the Kent lineout all kept Kent in the game. Herts looked strong with their big forwards and Kent dangerous with their outside backs. Bratton, Colegate and Young worked hard to ensure Kent had parity up front in the set piece.**

**On 38 minutes Sean Beckett, who had a strong game all afternoon, crashed over on the back of good work from Matas Jurevicious. Ollie Hobman converted to make the score 14-12. Ethan Wright was then forced from the pitch with injury being replaced by James Bowman.**

**Herts then took control of the match with a try either side of half time Rees in the 39th minute and Etherington in the 42nd both of which were converted by Bouchier to give the home side a 28-12 lead.**

**Going three scores down was a big ask to come back from. Kent introduced fresh legs in a scoreless next 18 minutes with the lively Mark Muhlemann replacing the dependable Billy Young. James Bowman on at 9 for Brendon Paulsen. Ciaran McGann for Jordan Thomas and Owen Church Mills for Tom Adamson.**

**On 60 minutes McGann, coming into the side following injury, gave Kent hope. Some good work on the inside saw the ball fed to McGann on an excellent running line and he carved through the home defence to score. Hobman converted 28-19.**

**On 72 minutes Kent scored again. The ever dangerous Grandidier going over following good work from Hobman, Church-Mills and Bowman. Hobman converted 28-26. Sam Beagley and Zeki Yesilmen were added to maintain the impetus that the replacement players had brought to the game.**

**Kent’s come back was complete on 78 minutes when Hobman kicked a penalty to put Kent into the lead 28-29.**

**Sadly, a last play of the game saw Hertfordshire retain possession for a number of minutes and phases to eventually win a kickable penalty which secured them the victory and a home quarter-final against Cornwall.**

**This was a pulsating match. Kent showed great character and tenacity to come from 28-12 down to lead only to have victory cruelly taken away at the end with the final kick of the match.**

**Despite the defeat Kent can be proud of their performance and with players returning from injury selection will be interesting for their away quarter final in Gloucestershire on March 31st.**