

Hampshire 43 Kent 44

A wonderful advert for rugby union's County Championship, played out on a fine afternoon on Havant RFC's 4G surface at Hooks Lane.

While not, perhaps, one for the connoisseur, unfamiliar and porous defences saw to that, it nevertheless sat on a knife-edge throughout, with only a sum of sixteen minutes when the score-margin slipped beyond a converted try, with Kent edging home by the odd-point in a grand total of eighty-seven.

Ironic also, that a game featuring eleven tries would ultimately be decided by penalties.

With around eight minutes remaining, Hampshire full-back Rhodri Adamson struck a beauty from the half-way line to push his side, who had trailed for most of the contest, into a two-point lead.

Moments later, Frank Reynolds saw a similar effort fall just short, but as Kent pressed again, their scrum, which had an edge throughout, won an easier penalty, and the Canterbury fly-half duly obliged, taking his match tally to nineteen, and leaving the visitors with just three minutes to defend, turn possession, and claim victory.

'Frankie kicked superbly today, even the long-range attempt only fell a yard under the bar but was accurate', said a relieved Taff Gwilliam, Kent's Director of Rugby. 'Our nerves were on edge, I'm just delighted the boys came through.'

'We must put this in perspective. We've had just two training sessions, and were very disjointed at times,' he continued. 'But they're all good rugby players, the communication skills were excellent, and we hung in there and, fortunately, prevailed.'

Indeed, that fragmentation showed up in only the fourth minute, as Hampshire sliced down the left wing, and Curtis Barnes' inside ball sent fly-half Tom Fieldsend across for the only unconverted try of the match.

However, a second 'tap and go' attempt saw Matt Harrison across at the other end, and the Westcombe Park inside-centre soon followed up with an intercept to put wing Jack Cohen over for Kent's try.

Two Reynolds penalties sandwiched a try from Hampshire and Havant second-row Harrison Young from a close-range scrum, and as the host county spread ball across field from a tap-penalty, Barnes sped across to bring the scores to within a single point.

Loose ball was picked up by Harrison to extend Kent's lead again, but the visitors' defensive frailties were exposed again as Hants' inside-centre Tom Gwyther strolled across from a scrum conceded at the re-start, to pull the hosts back within a point at 27-26 at the break.

Kent started well in the second period, only to lose ball forward twice, but on 50 minutes, the visitors picked and drove off lineout ball for Bobby Bratton to score.

Hampshire, however, now started putting phases together for the Worthing duo of Fieldsmen, and then loose-head Dan Sargent, to cross and, as the hour-mark approached, the host county moved into the lead for the first time since the early stages.

Only briefly though, as a penalty to touch saw Kent set up the drive from which TJ's hooker Joe Duffy powered across, putting Kent 41-40 ahead before the final kicking duel settled the outcome.

With the eleventh-hour withdrawal of Surrey from the competition, Kent can only now sit tight and await other results to see if this result is enough to enable them to contest the final at Twickenham on Saturday 4th June.

Hampshire

Tries: Fieldsend 4, 53, Young 24, Barnes 32, Gwyther 37, Sargent 59

Conv: Adamson 24, 32, 37, 53, 59

Pens: Adamson 72

Kent

Tries: Harrison 8, 34, Cohen 14, Bratton 50, Duffy 62

Conv: Reynolds 8, 14, 34, 50, 62

Pens: Reynolds 17, 30, 77

Kent Team

15	Cameron Hancock	<i>Westcombe Park</i>
14	Jack Cohen	<i>Brunel University</i>
13	Keita Orelaji	<i>Westcombe Park</i>
12	Matt Harrison	<i>Westcombe Park</i>
11	Max Halliday	<i>Canterbury</i>
10	Frank Reynolds	<i>Canterbury</i>
9	Tom Williams	<i>Canterbury</i>
1	Luke Boon	<i>Tonbridge Juddian</i>
2	Joe Duffy	<i>Tonbridge Juddian</i>
3	Bobby Bratton	<i>Tonbridge Juddian</i>
4	Joshua Smith	<i>Westcombe Park</i>
5	Royce Cadman	<i>Canterbury</i>
6	Jess Liston (Capt)	<i>Eaton Manor</i>
7	Daniel Dass	<i>Blackheath</i>
8	Tom Stradwick	<i>Blackheath</i>

16	Billy Sandison	<i>Medway</i>
17	Will McColl	<i>Canterbury</i>
18	Z Jones	<i>Sidcup</i>
19	Anthony Clement	<i>Medway</i>
20	Jacob Buckley	<i>Westcombe Park</i>
21	Ben Fryatt	<i>Westcombe Park</i>
22	H English	

Graham Cox