

## **Cornwall 31 Kent 34**

The lead changed hands no fewer than five times in this gripping contest, and only in the 72<sup>nd</sup> minute, when Blackheath centre Jake Hennessey crossed for Kent's fourth try, did the points margin move beyond a converted score.

Even then, a late try from Redruth open-side Sam Stevens meant a desperate final play, which eventually came to a halt as the Cornishmen conceded a penalty and, with Frank Reynolds hoofing the ball to touch, Kent could begin revelling in anticipation of their first top tier County Championship Final appearance for 37 years.

With Camborne's Recreation Ground bathed in spring sunshine, Kent got the better start, only for the ball to be held up over the Cornwall goal-line following a Hennessey break, but as Cornwall infringed under the posts, Sam Evans, who struck 14 points in a faultless kicking display, took the quick-tap to send Toby Wallace over for an early lead.

However, defensive errors put the visitors under pressure and, following three points from Redruth's Fraser Honey, a stumble in the in-goal allowed Cornwall scrum-half Mike Austin to touch down loose ball to give the host county the lead.

Two Evans penalties restored the advantage for the visitors but, roared on by the partisan crowd in excess of two thousand, the Cornishmen drove impressively through the midfield before full-back Matt Shepherd was put across next to the uprights.

Again though, it was a short-lived advantage for the hosts. Kent may have been fortunate not to have lost possession at the lineout, but as play moved infield with skipper Jamie Stephens, Matt Harrison put his Westcombe Park colleague, the deserving Rafael Dutta, across for the try which gave the visitors a 20-17 lead at the break.

Cornwall's best period came after the re-start, and it was the moment their black-and-gold clad faithful around the perimeter sensed their side might take the game away.

Two minutes in saw centre Nico Di Batista slip through a gaping hole in the Kent defence for a try on his home ground, and had two penalty attempts not fallen narrowly off target, the Cornishmen would have gained a firm grip.

Instead, the Kent scrum, with the formidable Luke Boon at loose-head, and which had been on top throughout, turned the screw further, and as Medway's Alfie Orris came off his wing to make the diagonal run to the try-line, the visitors moved back into a lead that this time they weren't to surrender.

Cornwall always posed danger, particularly through the ever-lively Austin, but with eight minutes remaining, Bryan Hotston broke from full-back to turn defence into attack. With Tom Stradwick in support, Hennessey cut a fine angle to make further ground, and as Cornwall illegally killed the move on the twenty-two, the outside-centre caught them off-guard with a tap-and-go for the try.

The closing minutes were intense with Cornwall pressing hard, but little fell right for them with loose passes and lost possession, until Stevens was worked across with a minute to play, Honey drop-kicking the conversion.

Too little, too late, and Camborne quickly became silent, bar the sounds of Kent players celebrating the county's first-ever victory on Cornish soil, and a meeting with Lancashire at Twickenham on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> May.

### **Cornwall**

Tries: Austin 20, Shepherd 34, Di Batista 42, Stevens 79  
Conv: Honey 20, 34, 42, 79  
Pens: Honey 13

### **Kent**

Tries: Wallace 8, Dutta 37, Orris 54, Hennessey 72  
Conv: Evans 8, 37, 54, 72  
Pens: Evans 29, 31

*Graham Cox*