



## Score

Basingstoke 11 - 3 Weymouth

## Report

Everyone loves an underdog story, especially one that ends with a victory for the team with the long odds. Hoping to cause their own upset and despite a squad ravaged by injuries, Basingstoke sent 7 of their hardest and most committed players for the long trip down to Weymouth to try and bring an unlikely victory back to Hampshire.

The signs were not good from the start, with no substitutes to call on the Basingstoke men knew they were in for a challenging game, one where energy levels and discipline would have to be tightly controlled to stand any chance of lasting the full match. Facing a full 13 players in the Weymouth squad, which included some old and new faces, you'd have been forgiven for thinking it was a futile attempt to expect any more than damage limitation. Indeed, with 5 minutes of the game gone Weymouth had pulled 2 goals ahead with no reply and seemed to be cruising. At this point though, Basingstoke dragged themselves back into the game with a well taken goal from Matt Girle, and suddenly a bit of belief began to creep in. By ensuring they stuck to the basics, and playing simple, quality water polo, the away side found they had the ability to expose Weymouth's weaknesses and take full advantage. Shortly after, Tom Lee dispatched his first of the game, reacting quickest to turn the ball home after his initial shot was saved from a drive across goal. Matt Girle added another before the end of the first period and with a quarter of the game gone it was Basingstoke who were ahead.

It was a lead they would never relinquish. The second quarter brought with it an even better level of focus. Having identified the biggest threat from Weymouth as being the ball into pit attack, this was quickly nullified by clever dropping from around the arc, most notably so from Alex Pullen who single-handedly ended numerous Weymouth attacks by this method. With their main attacking option defeated, Basingstoke continued to show they were just as good in attack as they were at defending and over the next 8 minutes they pulled further in front. Tom Lee added another 2 to his tally before Dan Sawyer got himself on the score sheet, the two youngest players on the team taking on the responsibility of scoring and between them pulling the team another 3 goals ahead. A shutout in defence meant the half time score was 6-2.

The third quarter is always critical in matches, even more so in this fixture as it's when legs and arms start to tire. Basingstoke knew that although they had a healthy lead, one poor quarter could easily let Weymouth back into the game and undo all their hard work. It was testament to the mentality of the 7 players in the pool that not only did the defence hold out but the attacking play continued to adapt to different situations and exploit openings wherever they appeared. Tom Lee and Matt Girle both added another goal each early on in this quarter, before James Stone began to get some space in the pit after persevering against a drop defence for so much of the game, and dispatched his first. Another 3 goals this quarter were just rewards for the team, and although the players were tiring and Weymouth had a bit more space to take some shots they found the defence backed up by Keeper/Captain Mike Sheath, fresh back in his first fixture after an injury lay off and boosting the team with his return. Showing no sign of rustiness, Sheath pulled off a string of saves this quarter and was able to launch a number of counterattacks with some clever passing from the back. For the second consecutive quarter, Basingstoke conceded no goals meaning they would go into the final quarter with a 9-2 lead.

With the end in sight, the final quarter would be all about managing the game. Controlling the pace and playing with a professional mindset would help take Basingstoke over the line. This is exactly what the team was able to do, and the Weymouth heads finally begin to drop as the clock ticked down. James Stone quickly scored his second of the game, and despite the home side finally finding a way through and replying with a goal of their own, Stone sealed the deal with a minute left with his third goal. Basingstoke made sure they stayed on the front foot this quarter, any hopes Weymouth had of a sustained attack on our goal was quickly dispelled by some clever counterattacking from Jake Tippey, who although didn't get on the scoresheet was a threat all throughout this final quarter, set up James Stone for his third, and meant Weymouth could never settle in attack for fear of getting caught out on the counter. As the final buzzer went there was a

brief moment of disbelief, followed by a surge of pride that despite travelling all this way with the bare bones of a squad, the lads had played the best game they could have done and been rewarded with a dominant victory.

Captain Mike Sheath said after the game: 'We believe we are a good side, and go into every game confident we can do enough to win, but even the most die-hard believer would be forgiven for thinking tonight would have been a step too far for us! For me, the best thing we can take away from this game was how well we managed the game, how calm and professional we remained throughout and got the result we deserved. We worked so well as a team and showed that we can play the simple polo needed to win games, and do it well. To come away with such a healthy score line from what we felt was a tough, close game overall is credit to how well we played and hopefully we can use this game as a springboard to get more good results in our remaining fixtures.'

Team and scorers: 1. Mike Sheath© 2. Jake Tippey 3. James Stone (3) 4. Alex Pullen 5. Dan Sawyer (1) 6. Tom Lee (4) 7. Matt Girle (3).

**Coach Gerry Lay**