

Date: 29<sup>th</sup> October 2018**Score**

Basingstoke 10 - 7 Portsmouth

**Report**

A chilly October weekend brought with it the first match of this season's Hampshire League, and Basingstoke knew a home match against Portsmouth was a good a chance as any to hit the ground running and get their season off to a winning start.

Despite this, there was definitely some post-summer rust to shake off and the game wasn't as free flowing as either team would have liked. Once the cobwebs were blown away however Basingstoke were the quicker team to find their rhythm and opened the scoring with James Stone picking up where he left off last season with a dominant display in pit attack. Portsmouth soon responded and turned score line around with two quick goals, but Basingstoke were looking more and more dangerous with every attack and levelled the scores with 2 seconds remaining of the first quarter, a finely taken goal from Ned Kater to bring the game back into balance.

Boosted by the good performance from the first quarter, Basingstoke again were quicker out the blocks and Ned Kater fired in his second of the game, showing great improvisation to take the goalie by surprise with a goal from pit. Omer Cumik then added his name to the list of scorers with 5 meter shot that would have beaten even the best of keepers, and gave Basingstoke a 2 goal cushion for the first time in the match. Unfortunately for the home side, the familiar complacency demons crept back in and after putting some daylight between the teams, Portsmouth showed they were no pushovers and were soon back level again. With the scores tied Basingstoke had their chances to rebuild their lead, but luck wasn't with them as Richard Kesteven and Dave Trehwella both saw shots hit the woodwork. As a result of this, Portsmouth were able to finish the quarter with another goal and a 5-4 lead at the halfway mark.

It is said Water Polo matches can be won or lost in the third quarter, as any lack of fitness starts to show. Fortunately, the home side have been busy training hard over the summer and this showed as the quarter developed. Defensively they tightened up and protected the goal better, and this was helped by Matt Girle producing a masterclass in pit defending to take Portsmouth's most dangerous player out of the game. The backbone of a good attack is always built on solid defence, and it wasn't long before Basingstoke were back level. It was a goal made all the way from the back as keeper Mike Sheath, fresh from his exploits in this season's National League, decided to bypass the entire Portsmouth defence with a pinpoint 20 meter pass to set Stone up for a fine backhand shot from the pit. Confidence soaring, Basingstoke kept the pressure on and went on to score another 3 goals this quarter, one more each for Stone and Cumik and also a first goal of the season for Alex Pullen, who took advantage of Portsmouth dropping off the arc to fire home. A single goal for the away side this quarter meant Basingstoke had turned the game on its head and led 8-6 going into the final period.

Hard work done, Basingstoke needed to protect the lead and see the game out to be sure of the win. This was done to great effect, staying calm in defence and building plenty of dangerous attacks to make sure they weren't handing the initiative too much to the opposition. Sam Taylor and Jake Cleverley both saw shots miss by a whisker, and although Stone brought his tally to 4 for the game Basingstoke should have really extended their lead further. As it was, they led by 3 with 5 minutes to go. Portsmouth clawed one back but quickly found they would be allowed no such luxury again, as Mike Sheath provided a last line of defence that the shooters could find no way past, whether it was from distance or from the pit. As shot after shot was saved, Portsmouth committed more to each attack and were eventually caught out on the break, Luke Sawyer sealing the win for the home side with a well taken goal to restore Basingstoke's 3 goal lead with less than a minute left. That was to be the final goal, and with the win under their belts Basingstoke could celebrate a good performance and deserved victory.



Captain Sheath said after the game: 'It's always good to get a win here at home, and it feels great to start the season with a performance like that. After suffering defeat in this same fixture last year we can really see the improvement in this group of players, and it showed today the benefits of training together and learning to play as a team. Hopefully we can build on this, and if we can produce a performance like that each time we play then there's no reason we can't be targeting a win in every game we play this year.'

Team and scorers: 1. Mike Sheath 2. Richard Kesteven 3. Omer Cumik (2) 4. Sam Taylor 5. Ned Kater (2) 6. James Stone (4) 7. Jake Cleverley 8. Dave Trehella 9. Luke Sawyer (1) 10. Alex Pullen (1) 11. Matt Girle

**Coach Gerry Lay**