

September 19. 2009

Meralomas vs. UBCOB Ravens

-

Saturday marked the opening of the 2009 Spray League season, and the latest installment of the classic west side rivalry between the Meralomas and the Ravens. The defending premier league champs traveled down 4th Ave. to Jericho Park, looking to open the season right where things left off in the spring. However, with as many new faces in the lineup as old familiar ones, it would take the opening kickoff to really see where the Lomas stood in their pursuit of a title defense. Despite the Ravens struggles of last season, the club always seems to find a little extra in the tank when it comes to neighbourhood bragging rights.

The festivities kicked off with the first division sides taking the field under a light breeze and sunny skies. The first half was marked by a distinct lack of continuity, as new combinations, especially in the back line, struggled to get in sync. Passes a fraction too late, lines cut at slightly the wrong angle and pace underestimated all contributed to the lack of flowing rugby. The Lomas forward pack benefited from more familiarity and as such settled earlier, gradually exerting their authority in the set pieces and breakdowns and setting the tone for a markedly improved second half.

With little offense to speak of by either side, the highlights of the first half really only amounted to a brief skirmish after a late hit by the Ravens and retaliating hit by the Lomas which saw Lomas hooker Mark Farrally retired to the bin to think about his transgressions.

The second half saw a refocused Lomas side finally start to get on the same page as the halfback combination began connecting more crisply, facilitating smoother distribution through the rest of the backline. Once the ball started moving through the hands, the points followed and despite their game efforts, the Ravens were unable to weather the attack. At the final whistle, the score stood at 24-3 in the favour of the visitors.

Strong games were had by flanker Luke Dinely, Frank Smith coming in off the bench, the aforementioned Farrally, and in the backline rookie number ten, Brian Kyrer, distributed ball very effectively.

The elite division game pitted two teams that finished at opposite ends of the standings in the spring, yet the early going showed little disparity between the sides. The first 20 minutes were played between the 22's, with neither team stringing together much in the way of any sustained attack. The Lomas finally broke the deadlock with Shawn Mercier springing loose for a 20-meter scamper down the sideline to put the visitors up 5-0.

The Ravens responded with some offensive pressure of their own, which was ably countered by the Loma defense. However, from a lineout just outside the 22, a Ravens player slipped out from the resulting maul and touched down in the corner to even the score at 5-5.

As the first half neared its end, the Lomas mounted another attack, spearheaded by a strong counter run from fullback Dave Carter, supported by Kyle Haley. This led to a penalty call against the home side 30 meters out. Mike Hall slotted the kick to put the Lomas ahead 8-5 going into the halftime break.

The Lomas came out hard to start the second half, hitting the Ravens with a concerted attack, which they tenaciously absorbed. The Ravens then returned the favour and forced the Lomas into a defensive position. This led to a breakdown deep in the attacking zone, and after a couple of missed tackles, the Ravens #14 crossed the line to put them ahead 10-8.

At this point, the Lomas started to use their bench depth to get some fresher legs onto the field. This paid dividends quickly, as Josh Clarke, no doubt benefiting from a summer of ARC training, blocked a clearing attempt deep in Ravens territory. He then alertly chased down the ball and touched it down in the corner. This gave the Lomas a lead 13-10 with about 10 minutes left.

But as in any rivalry over territorial supremacy, the Ravens were not about to concede defeat. After a series of rucks, the Ravens hard work was rewarded with a quick pass springing the winger for the final tally of the day, and a season opening win. The final score was Ravens 17, Lomas 13.

There were strong individual performances, notably from veteran winger Mercier and newcomer Pat Trichler at flank, but overall, a lack of continuity and sustained attack thwarted the Lomas efforts on the day. With the next game against the resurgent Rowing Club, fresh off a decisive win over the Capitanos, Coach Bromley will be looking for a far more cohesive effort from his squad.

Stefan Schulson
09/19/09