

October 3, 2009

Tough Day at the Office – Lomas Go 1 for 5

By Stefan Schulson

Vancouver, B.C. – Saturday saw the Burnaby Lake Rugby Club venture en masse over to Kitsilano to take on the Meralomas. With two women's fixtures and three men's games on the schedule, it was due to be a busy day at Connaught Park. This was also the first installment of the annual Palmer Cup challenge between the two clubs, a total wins series encompassing all three men's divisions. With Burnaby never having raised the cup in its 10 year history, they were looking to change that trend, although presumably that would be something that they have been trying to do for 10 years now.

The 2nd division women kicked things off, and represented the only success that the Lomas were to have on the day, pulling out a 13-12 win. This was supposed to be followed by the third division men, but Delta Force was forced to forfeit the game due to a shortage of healthy and available players. Coaches Gaze and Brial will have their work cut out for them over the next two weeks cobbling together a viable lineup.

The first division men's game was a closely contested match right to the final whistle. As time was about to expire, the Lomas were awarded a penalty in front of the Burnaby posts. When asked what the score was, the referee had the Lomas down by two points. The choice, therefore, was simple: kick the penalty and take the one point victory. Unfortunately, the ref should have double-checked his addition, as Burnaby actually held a four point lead, and hence held on for the 22-21 victory. Another strong game was had by ginger flanker Pat Tritchler, a regular in the post game boat races through the first three games of the season.

The women's premier game pitted a relatively young Meraloma squad against the defending B.C. champion Burnaby side. With the Lomas looking to move into the upper echelon of the premier competition, this game would be a good barometer of their progress. Early action saw the Lomas dominate set-piece play, putting the Burnaby scrum on their heels. However, the Burnaby women showed their poise in open field play and opened scoring twenty minutes into the game. They maintained the pressure throughout the first half, and despite some stalwart defense from the Lomas, took a 14-0 lead into the break.

Scoring was hard to come by in the second half, as the Lomas held the potent Burnaby attack to a single penalty goal. The final score was 17-0 in favour of the defending champs, but the Lomas women will certainly take some positives out of the game. Strong scrummaging and mauling were evident, and if they are able to address some ball retention issues in the rucks, they should be in a good position going forward to the rest of the season. Strong games were had by Brittany Waters in the backs, and by Tara Connolly and Barbie Maher in the forwards.

In the men's elite division game, the Lomas fielded a mixed lineup of veteran and young players, some of which had not yet seen top-level game action. Early play saw the technically superior Meraloma scrum exert its dominance, putting the opposition on the defensive. Burnaby quickly ran afoul of the referee and took an extended string of penalties, leading to an early Mike Hall penalty kick and a 3-0 Lomas lead. This was followed by an extended period of back and forth play with each side exchanging penalty kicks. It was not until near the end of the first half that Burnaby was finally able to breach the black and orange defensive wall. A botched tackle let the Lakers centre pop through for the first try of the game and a 10-3 Burnaby lead.

Three minutes later, the ball took a fortuitous Burnaby bounce, and some quick hands put the ball into the hands of the lanky #8. The physical mismatch was too much for rookie Lomas winger Dan Franz-Hernandez who was brushed aside like dandruff off your shoulder as Burnaby took a 15-6 halftime lead.

The second half saw the Lomas down to 14 men ten minutes into the action as flanker Greg Georgas was yellow-carded for hands in the ruck. Despite being short-handed, the Lomas sustained their pressure and forced Burnaby into taking a penalty inside the 22. Hall slotted the kick and the score stood at 15-9 for the visitors. Burnaby got the three points back 10 minutes later, and with time running out, the Lomas had to finish strong if they were to avoid a near-sweep on the day.

With time dwindling, the Lomas worked their way downfield and had Burnaby defending in the shadow of their own goal posts. A five meter scrum was called for, and assistant coach and scrum guru Angel Cividanes was nearly overcome with excitement. In his trademark spanglish he called for the push-over try. The Lomas scrum dug in, and once the ball was put-in, the drive was on, shoving the massive Burnaby front row backwards towards the try line. If it were not for an infringement at the back of the scrum by Burnaby, the try would have been a foregone conclusion. Instead, a penalty try was awarded, and the Lomas brought the score to within two points. Unfortunately, that was as close as the Lomas got, and Burnaby held on for the win and a three games to none lead in the Palmer Cup series.

Strong games were had by #13 French Kevin and #5 "Ginger Beef" Akehurst.

The loss drops the Lomas record to 1-2 in elite division play. With a fixture against arch rival Capilanos coming up on the 17th, the Meralomas will be faced with a hard two weeks of training to get their season back on track.

On a lighter note, the shitless lads of team No Ma'am put in a dominant performance against team T.B.A. to take the first Flip-cup tournament of the year.