

Kendal reign supreme

Contributed by John Walsh
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ASPATRIA put up a battling performance in the final of the Story Cumbria Cup before losing 35-25 to the top team in the county, unbeaten Kendal.

The Mint Bridge side had won every game in North One to win the title and promotion, so for Aspatria to lead into the second half and run them so close was a brave effort.

Chairman of rugby Mark Richardson said: "I thought in the first-half we played some of our best rugby of the season and deserved to be ahead at the break.

"We gave away some silly penalties and then I'm afraid the penalty county became astronomical in the second-half and we didn't really get the rub of the green on a lot of those decisions.

"Kendal were able to put a bit of distance between us and got too far ahead, although we came back well again in the closing stages.

"I just felt rather aggrieved at some of the penalty decisions but overall we did well against a team who had swept all before them this season."

One of the key figures in putting Aspatria 10-0 ahead in the first-half was joint player-coach, the former Kendal fly-half Mike Scott.

His clever kicking troubled Kendal in the early stages and he was able to guide Aspatria round the field into some good attacking positions.

They actually took the lead with a try from Mark Irving who was backing-up well after some good inter-passing between backs and forwards. Scott tacked on the extras.

Scott landed a penalty to give Aspatria a 10-0 cushion but then they started giving away penalties as the Kendal pack tried to turn the screw.

Dan Stephens kicked three of them to cut the deficit to 10-9 at the break.

Scott was not prepared to let Aspatria's early advantage be eroded and soon after the break he improved their position with a clever drop goal.

But again the penalty count proved decisive and Stephens was able to cut the gap again to a point with his fourth success.

Aspatria were under pressure again and Kendal were awarded a penalty try for the Black Reds bringing down a maul. Stephens converted and they were ahead for the first time in the game.

At last they appeared to have broken the Aspatria spirit and when prop Billy Coxon went 50 yards for the second try it looked as though the floodgates might open.

Two more penalties by Stephens and a try from Mark Wilson suddenly had Kendal clear at 35-13 with the Cup as good as on its way back to Mint Bridge.

But again Aspatria rallied and scored the best try of the game when some good handling by backs and forwards ended with Lee Tinnion showing his turn of pace to get away and score a try which Scott converted.

Still Aspatria weren't done and they grabbed a third try through South African centre Heinrich Jonker. But it was the last move of the game and as Scott's conversion was wide, the final whistle ended any thoughts of a remarkable come-back.

Having matched Kendal through three tries apiece it was a very commendable effort by the Black Reds who will be two Divisions lower than their conquerors next season