

## Sacramento Lions Get Big Win in NorCal

Written by Joel Scott

Sunday, 17 March 2013 14:12

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The Sacramento Lions got back on the winning track with a convincing 41-24 road victory over the East Palo Alto Bulldogs Saturday in Northern California DI league play.



After losing to the Bulldogs in the first league game of the season on an 80<sup>th</sup> minute interception try, and with 3<sup>rd</sup> place up for grabs in Northern California Division 1, the Lions had much to gain from a victory. While the Bulldogs never led, this rivalry has always proven to be a physical matchup and today lived up to the reputation.

“We knew we had to come out strong from the opening kick-off,” said Lions Manager Aaron Frederick. “The Bulldogs have no problem pushing teams around so we wanted to focus on fast-paced rugby and sticking to our system and game plan. We were far from perfect, but we stuck to our system much better than in previous games.”

The Lions came out of the gate fast using the athleticism of their forwards to insert in the backline and swing the ball wide. Lions wing Jeff Gillingham opened up the scoring in the 5<sup>th</sup> minute. The other Lions wing, Andre Whaley, scored in the 15<sup>th</sup>

and 21<sup>st</sup>

minute. The Lions took a 15-0 lead in the opening minutes by swiftly swinging the ball wide and

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testing the Bulldog backline's ability to spread their defense.

"The Bulldogs have big powerful forwards and are very good at keeping possession with tight ball," Lions Head Coach Iferemie Tawake said of the opposition. "In our last matchup, they were very successful moving forward in the first few channels. We knew we have the speed and athleticism to work the ball wide and when we utilized those options it worked out well for us."

The Bulldogs would get on the board in the 30<sup>th</sup> minute to bring the score to 15-7. But Andre Whaley struck again for his hat-trick in the 35<sup>th</sup> minute, bringing the Lions' lead to 22-7. Whaley is a newcomer to the Lions and is part of a talented group of young football crossover athletes from Sacramento City College that have joined the Lions this season. While this group is still learning the intricacies of rugby, there is no question of athletic capability and Whaley demonstrated that today. Whaley was also awarded man of the match by his coach and teammates for his hard work on the field today.

"Andre had a big game for us and it was great to see him score some tries for our first side today," said Tawake. "It is clear he will continue to do very well playing rugby. His defensive efforts were also very noticeable and there was no question he earned man of the match today."

While Whaley certainly displayed his athletic potential and finishing ability, his tries came from a team effort with the Lions using speed and swift hands to work the ball wide and keep the play alive. The Lions forwards were active and continued to outpace a powerful Bulldog pack. Lions flanker Johnny Green would score the final try of the first half in the 39<sup>th</sup> minute to bring the score 29-7 at the break.

Tawake cautioned his team not to become complacent in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half. "We needed to make sure we did not let off the momentum," he said. "We knew from our last encounter that the Bulldogs were never out of the game and could take the momentum at any time."

The Bulldogs were determined not to let this game get away from them and certainly fought for possession much more in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half. The Bulldogs opened up the 2<sup>nd</sup> half scoring quickly in the 42<sup>nd</sup> minute. Lions wing

Jeff Gillingham answered right back with a try in the 45<sup>th</sup>

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minute.

The Bulldogs started to step on the gas and scored two more tries in the 57<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> minute, making it 36-24. The Bulldogs played to their strength and kept possession in tight and used their forwards as battering rams to move the ball forward and bring the score close. The Bulldogs efforts were imposing, but it wasn't enough. Lions wing Byron Gibson (another Sac City crossover athlete) scored the final try in the 75<sup>th</sup>

minute and the Lions took home the win 41-24.

"I think today showed we had the potential to play well against a really good team," said Tawake. "Today was a good test to show we are moving forward in the second half of the season. I was proud of the Lions today, but we still have more rugby to play and need to continue moving forward."

The Lions and the Bulldogs have more rugby to play, and 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> place in the Pacific Coast are still up for grabs. This win, however, keeps the Lions' hopes alive for 2<sup>nd</sup> place in Northern California, which could benefit them significantly in the post-season with 3<sup>rd</sup> in the PCRFU. The Lions still have Olympic Club next weekend, and will close out the season with Bay Area Barbarians and San Francisco Golden Gate. In these final games, every bonus point will be critical for the Lions.

"We still have some serious competition ahead of us," stated Frederick. "We are really trying to keep our foot on the gas in the last couple months here. We have no excuse not to be successful and I know Coach Tawake will be working these guys very hard to improve as we move forward."

Meanwhile, the Olympic Club easily got by the Bay Barbarians 61-7, while SFGG put the EPA Razorbacks to the sword 76-5.

That leaves the standings as follows.

**NorCal DI Men League**

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<b>Club</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>T</b>
SFGG	8	0	0
OPSB	3	1	0

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Sacramento Lions	5	3	0
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EPA Bulldogs	5	4	0
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Olympic Club	3	5	0
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EPA Razorbacks	1	6	0
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Bay Barbarians	0	6	0
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*RUGBYMag.com Staff contributed to this report.*