



Joe Baker was a try-scorer for the second week running.

Picture: DARRYL BROWN

Sharks take a big bite out of the Centurions as St Albans lose first game of the season

St Albans Centurions fell to their first East Rugby League defeat of the season as they lost 38-24 at Southend Sharks.

They had travelled to the Essex coast with a much-changed squad and it proved costly after a disastrous opening period.

But they managed to fight back and could have got something from the game only to concede again in the second half.

The start was as horrific as it possibly could have been.

Saints began sluggishly against the quick-moving Sharks and converted tries in the second and ninth minutes left the Hertfordshire outfit 12-0 down before they'd hardly had chance to draw breath.

But under Simba Mupamhanga's coaching, this side is nothing if not resilient.

Joe Baker grabbed a now customary try, going over in the

Rugby League

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19th minute and then converted by Chad Turley, and even though the impressive Southend outfit scored again, tries from Tom Spratt and the excellent Godson Sado, both converted by Turley, saw the teams go into half-time level at 18-18.

The start to the second-half was uncompromising with the teams battling hard for the upper hand.

And despite heroic performances from the likes of Baker, Spratt and Niall Braniff, each completing 17 bone-crunching tackles, it was the home team that broke free to score two tries, converting one of them.

For the Centurions to have any

hope, they had to grab the next try and with less than 15 minutes to go on the clock they did just that.

It was Mupamhanga who got it, crossing the line in style and allowing Turley to add his fourth conversion of the match.

All that momentum was lost, however, when the Sharks got their sixth try of the match and a seventh score against a rapidly-tiring Centurions side finished the game off.

But both coach and manager took heart from this battling defeat.

Mupamhanga believed the young lads making their debuts "had genuine raw potential and will quickly improve over the next few weeks" while Tony Bottomley has particular praise for Isaac Lee, calling him an "excellent loose forward who impressed against a very good Sharks team".

The Centurions go to Bedford Tigers in the cup on Saturday.

Cycling

There were a number of successes for Verulam Reallymoving's masters and youths

The St Albans-based team's good week started with Paul Caton taking his second win of the year at Milton Keynes in the LVRC Criterium Series.

The result points him at the top of the standings and he said: "The racing is always tough on this short but technically difficult circuit and this week was no different."

Jamie Maxen meanwhile took second in the MK Bowl

Midweek Youth Series.

The club were also praised for their annual road race, held on the Cross End circuit near Bedford.

The men's race was won by Greg Fitzek of the ZeroBC race team with Matt Watson of Rock & Road Bikes Ellisix taking third as well as best junior.

The women's race was won by Keira McVitty of Datalynx-Parenesis.

Verulam CC chairman Doug Driscoll thanked the officials, British Cycling commissaries, marshals and volunteers involved in putting on the event.

Athletics

A quieter week than most for St Albans Striders was lit up by one very special run.

James McMurray took home the 1500m title at the British Milers' Club open meeting at Watford, hitting the tape in a personal best time of three minutes 41.7 seconds.

That achievement saw him running at sub four-minute mile pace.

The Striders members

also travelled to a variety of races around the country over the weekend.

Graham Smith was third overall and first V40 at the Bledlow Ridge Off Roader 10k in Buckinghamshire.

He completed the tough hilly course in 42:49.

Richard Evans was another to get a PB as he clocked 37:36 at the Woodbridge 10k in Suffolk.

Ali Massey was second lady and ran her best time at Oakhill Parkrun.

Swimming



The successful St Albans swim squad.

The St Albans District Primary Schools Swimming team achieved their third win in three years at the Herts Primary Schools Inter-District Swimming Championships.

The team, comprising the top Year 5 and 6 swimmers from across the district were behind Watford early on but came storming back to retain the Rosebowl trophy.

Leading from the front were captains William Fawcett, who won the Year 6 butterfly, and Camille Vannier who was a close

second in the Year 6 freestyle.

Wins also came from Emily Gray, Year 5 girls' freestyle, who was 0.1s outside the record, Sonny Maddison, Year 5 boys' backstroke and Tom Dennis, Year 6 boys' freestyle.

The team also won the Year 5 and Year 6 boys' trophies and the half of the relays.

Team manager Andrew Ellis said: "The team put in an excellent performance to win comfortably, confirming the high standard of swimmers in the district."

sport

Basketball

National League Division One basketball will come to St Albans for the first time next season as Oaklands College and Leopards announced an exciting new partnership.

The Big Cats will continue to play some home games at the Brentwood Centre but eight games and all other activities will be based at the college.

The two organisations previously worked together between 2015-2018 but a strengthened link will now see Oaklands' Thomas Baker coaching Leopards.

Director of basketball Michael Ball said: "The two keys for us were the confirmation of Thomas Baker at the helm and the agreement of all training sessions taking place at

Oaklands College.

"This now means that some of our Oaklands College academy players will have the opportunity to be part of a positively coached men's programme where they are going to have to compete and train even harder which can only help them grow."

The league sits one level below the BBL, the top flight in the country.