

## Blaze Face Off Against South Side Irish

### Dominating Second Half Ignites Blaze to Victory

It was a tale of two halves for the Chicago Blaze, but they came out victorious 43-5 against the South Side Irish on Saturday at the Dan Ryan Woods.

The Blaze came out strong and immediately set the tone. They received the opening kickoff and quickly went through a few phases before finding themselves inside the Irish 22-meter line.

After an unfortunate knock on, the Blaze won the Irish put in, returning the possession back. They quickly got it out to the backline, and it was Blaze veteran and Mr. Do-It-All Matt Beckham, who dotted it down in the left corner, giving the Blaze an early 5-0 lead. The kick was then impressively converted by Zane Jackson.

The next 15 minutes were seemingly a clinic in set pieces, as the Blaze displayed their dominance in the forwards, resulting in the SSI turning over line outs and scrums. The Blaze, however, did not turn that control into points.

During the first half, the Irish were able to stay close due to Blaze miscues. Countless offsides by the Blaze seemed to be the only way the Irish were able to sustain drives. One of the drives in which the Irish were able to maintain possession with a few carries was assisted by another Blaze penalty, with the Irish finding themselves inside the Blaze 22-meter line.

That's where Blaze captain Kyle Bryant landed two big hits on Irish ball-carriers that seemed to stop the momentum. That was until the referee's hand went up, signaling the Blaze were once again offsides. After a few quick phases, the Irish finally put one in the try zone and got on the scoreboard. At the half, it was the Blaze that held a 7-5 edge.

"After a big win against Indy, we wanted to keep the momentum rolling into this match and that's exactly what we did," captain Kyle Bryant said. "It was a back-and-forth battle for the first half." But the halftime score was as close as the Irish would get. The second half started out electrically, with winger Matt Beckham stealing the opening kickoff and navigating his way through the defense to score in the first minute and bring the score to 12-5.

A bit of adversity did strike, as Blaze 8-man Jim Moscato was given a yellow card, leaving them a man down for the next 10 minutes. Some great work by the team, though, helped kill off the ten minutes in which the Blaze scored their second try of the half. This time, it was Blaze newcomer Chris Lamberton, who put it down in the right corner for a 17-5 lead.

As the game wore on, the Irish forwards seemed to gas out, leading to many overloads and scores taking advantage of gaps out wide. The next Blaze score came in the 62' minute, when Blaze winger Rene Salinas took a pass, weaved through seemingly all the defenders, bounced off the goal posts and dotted down the ball under the posts. Another Zane Jackson conversion made the game 24-5.

"Matt Borchardt's huge steal to start the second half was a game changer. Our back line had a day." Bryant stated.

Bryant's words could not ring any truer, as the Blaze managed to score three more times in the final 10 minutes. A Derek Mohler try at the 70' ignited the scoring before Vidal Martinez finished the game with two long tries in the 76' and 80' minute.

All seven tries on the day were scored out wide, and six were scored by their wings or fullback in what can only be described as a dominant performance overall.

During the first half of the match, we didn't capitalize on a lot of opportunities in their end and got pretty chippy in the first half, which was expected," Blaze head coach DJ Williams added. "Adjustments made during half time, along with reminding the guys to play our style, led to a display of how dominant we can be on the pitch.

"When we are communicating and stick to our playing style it's a beautiful sight to see. The leadership of Kyle (Bryant) stuck out this match in particular and led to our defense rallying around him, matching his intensity in contact. Our scrum was the highlight of the day, as they suffocated the SSI and won pretty much every ball they put in. This gave us the opportunity to do what we do best in counterattack allowing our guys to display their skill and flair."

The Blaze Man of the Match was Matt Borchardt. The two-try scorer made the unanimous play of the game starting the second half with a kickoff steal and score. Aside from having a great game carrying the ball and finding the space on the edge, Borchardt even filled in for the injured Alex Binetti at lineouts in true Jack-of-all-trades fashion.

The Division 2 squad is getting ready for its much-anticipated home matchup against Lincoln Park this Saturday. The Blaze are looking for a positive result after last year's tie in Chicago. Following the Lincoln Park game, they also have a Blaze Fossils match, as they take on the Fox Valley Old Boys. Game times will be released later in the week.

Tries: Matt Borchardt (2), Chris Lambertson (1), Rene Salinas (1), Derek Mohler (1), Vidal Martinez (2)  
Conversions: Zane Jackson (3), Kyle Bryant (1)

#### **Starting XV**

Kieran Palmiter  
Matt Kopala  
John Needham  
John Medina  
Kyle Bryant (C)  
Rapolos Dikinis  
Chris Lambertson  
Jim Moscato  
Brandyn Crotty (VC)  
Eddie Smith  
Rene Salinas  
Andrew Kallas  
Zane Jackson  
Matt Borchardt  
Vidal Martinez

#### **Reserves**

Andrew Hart  
Dave Mahl  
Ben Kipp  
Derek Mohler  
Jerry Vassalla  
Coach: DJ Williams