

Westcliff 27 Dorking 20

Westcliff kicked off the 2018/19 London Premier campaign as they had finished the last, with a home game against Dorking. Both teams fielded sides with several changes from the April clash won by the home team and Westcliff handed starts to Dartnell Henry Marrant and Bannister all of whom return to the club this season after time away from the game or area.

On a pleasant September afternoon Dorking kicked off and immediately recovered the ball and drove into Westcliff territory before a knock on brought the promising first attack to a halt. Westcliff enjoyed a solid platform at the scrum which allowed them to gain territory and possession and soon a penalty within range was forced. The attempt by Jones was well struck but faded to hit the upright and bounce back into play, Westcliff recovered and momentarily the door appeared to be open, but Dorking scrambled, and the opportunity was lost. A second opportunity was soon to arrive, and Jones successfully bisected the posts to establish a 3-0 lead. Again though the restart work from Westcliff was not good enough and Dorking seized the ball and for the next few minutes the momentum. Patient and direct probing from them was rewarded with a well worked unconverted try which gave the visitors the lead for the first but not the last time 3-5. Westcliff returned to the front foot and soon forced further penalties one of which which Jones again converted, and they led 6-5.

As the half hour mark approached a Westcliff attack around halfway broke down and the ball squirted loose from the tackle area to the feet of a Dorking player who swiftly kicked ahead and won the foot race to touch down for an opportunist try which was converted. The visitors led for a second time at 6-12. The response though from Westcliff was quick in coming and concerted pressure and forceful driving deep in the visitors 22 allowed Scogings to power over for a converted try. With the break approaching Westcliff continued to hammer at the line and drove a 5-metre scrum up to and over it however a knock on rather than a grounding was the referee's decision and the half ended with the narrowest of leads for the hosts 13-12.

A cross field breeze favoured the visitors in the second half and they enjoyed their best period in the third quarter. In the opening 10 minutes of the half they scored a further try through applying pressure and width and retook the lead once more 13-17. In the next 10 minutes they continued to enjoy the ascendancy and threatened to establish a potentially decisive lead. Westcliff

though refused to yield and in the final quarter reasserted themselves. The introduction from the bench of Mckeith and Maloney was a significant contributing factor and it was Mckeith who glided as in times past through the defence to restore the home teams lead albeit a slim one 20-17. Westcliff were now more composed and regaining control and momentum, but Dorking were not going away and a successful penalty tied the score up at 20 points each as the game headed to a conclusion. Westcliff now though seized the initiative for a final time and forced their way deep into visitors 22. From a driving lineout and further phases of short range drives Maloney punched through the defence to score the decisive try which was duly converted to lead 27-20. Several minutes did remain but Westcliff negotiated them without incident dominating territory and possession for much of that time to keep Dorking at arms length.

Its always good to win your first game and winning at home is important too so we can't be anything but delighted. We shouldn't though allow that satisfaction to blind us to the shortcomings in our performance. We had good moments, but we didn't play as well as we can or as we will need to when the games come thick and fast in the weeks ahead. We showed some rustiness and that's perhaps understandable fortunately that's something we can correct. Importantly we found a way to win the game and that's a credit to the lads desire and perseverance. They will need more of the same next week at Sidcup who had an impressive result of their own at Shelford.

S Brown, Merrick, Bannister, Stol, O Jones, J Jones, H Marrant, C Brown, B Marrant, Binneman, Dartnell, Scogings, Marsh, Hatton, Vandermolen REP
Macintyre, Maloney, Mckeith