

Sidcup 27 Westcliff 29

After an opening day win at The Gables Westcliff travelled to Sidcup who themselves had an impressive start to their season at Shelford. With skipper Marsh, Vandermolen and Maloney all unavailable in the back row, starts were handed to Jim Smith and Kostas Dellas. Fin Mackintyre was injured in training midweek so Binstead and Anderson-Brown were drafted into the squad taking a place each on the bench where they were joined by Jake Spivey. Co-Captain Jack Jones led the side who were straight into their stride.

Immediately from the kick off Westcliff were purposeful and direct stretching the home defence to breaking point and Smith received a scoring pass to cross the line under the posts still in the games opening minute. Jones converted and Westcliff had the best possible start except it very quickly got better, much better. An enterprising attack from deep with pace and width after just 5 minutes released Jack Jones on an inside support line to go in unopposed, once more he converted. Sidcup strove to respond and began to enjoy a little more territory and possession but another attack from deep with excellent support and a devastating running line from Stol resulted in a try for him and a 0-21 lead for the visitors after 17 minutes. It had been an extraordinary start but a shell shocked home side were not ready to lay down and got a foothold in the game with a converted try of their own in the second quarter and followed it up with another shortly after. At 14-21 it was definitely game back on and the home team had wrestled the momentum away from Westcliff. The visitors though were not yet done and had the final say of the half attacking once more out wide for Bannister to score in the corner. That being the final action of the half the visitors led at the break 14-26.

The second half was always likely to be tighter and Westcliff were to play up a slope and into a modest breeze. Required to spend more time defending they were initially keeping the Sidcup attacks at bay but mid half and seeking to play with the enterprise that paid handsome dividends in the first half they suffered a setback. An ambitious chip deep in their own half seeking to exploit space and opportunity was intercepted. Caught wrong footed by the turn over they also fell off the defensive tackle and the hosts were in behind and under the posts. At 21-26 and with 20 to go the result was once more in the balance, suddenly the hosts looked a little like favourites. Sidcup were in determined mood and attacked with vigour and conviction for their part Westcliff were equally determined in defence and held firm. They did though ship a couple of penalties in range and as the game careered towards a conclusion the home side led for the first time 27-26. Once again a way to win had to be found and the visitors drove their way up field. A period of sustained pressure followed on and around the home line. Sidcup defended ferociously but eventually the pressure produced an infringement and Jones slotted the ball through the uprights to restore a thin lead of 27-29. The remaining few minutes were successfully negotiated and the game drew to a conclusion when veteran Mckeith minced his way off the pitch with time up.

Another very satisfying result, a bonus point win away from home against a good side in confident mood. At times we played some great stuff although at others we created problems for ourselves whilst also answering the questions asked of us by a determined

home team. We brought in a couple of lads today that were short on game time, they probably didn't quite have the lungs and legs to go as long as they did but their contribution and impact were massive. Next week we are back at home for the visit of Hertford and with a couple of lads picking up knocks that will likely rule them out, further use of the extended squad is likely. Encouraging then that both the Lions and Rhinos also enjoyed victories in their opening day fixtures.

Bannister, Merrick, Stol, J Jones, O Jones, Mckeith, H Marrant, Brown, B Marrant, Binneman, Scogings, Dartnell, J Smith, Hatton, Dellas REP Anderson-Brown, Binstead, Spivey