

## Tunbridge Wells 13 Westcliff 19

After a physically intense encounter against Hertford the previous week, personnel changes in key positions were the order of the day for the visit to Tunbridge Wells. In the front row a heavy head knock ruled out influential tight head Binneman and Western who deputised well from the bench stepped up to the starting 15. In the second row Anderson-Brown was unavailable and Dartnell failed to shrug off an injury picked up at Sidcup. A first start of the season then was handed to Edwards back from a summer sojourn for barely a week and with the sum total of 1 training session under the belt since April. Also making a first start of the season for the 1<sup>st</sup> team at inside centre was Buster Reynolds who stepped into the shoes of Jones who was troubled by an ankle sprain that ruled him out. Maloney returned to the squad on the bench and was joined there by Ansell promoted from the Lions.

Prevailing conditions were in stark contrast to the previous week and with squally wind and rain to the fore it was apparent that the nature of the game would be to. Westcliff had the advantage offered by the modest slope for the first half and made pressure count with points in the opening stages. Mckeith converted two penalty attempts to establish an early 6 point lead before errors created by pressure and the difficult conditions allowed the hosts to strike back with a penalty of their own. Back went Westcliff and again a penalty was won and converted via the boot of Mckeith. Much of the game was taking place in the middle of the park with both sets of players committed in both defence and attack. The contest was ferocious intense and occasionally fractious as the teams battled for ascendancy. Early in the second quarter Wells added a penalty to close the score to 6-9 and shortly thereafter Vandermolten having been penalised once already for a slightly high tackle erred again and took a 10 minute breather. During this period Westcliff defended resolutely managed the game sensibly and moved downfield to score the games opening try, Merrick chasing and reaching first the ball dabbled in behind the defence by Bannister. Converted by Mckeith the visitors led 6-16 but still a man down they were required to defend stoutly for the remaining minutes of the half. Considerable pressure on their line was repelled for a testing final few minutes and they led by 10 points at the break.

The opening minutes of the second half were equally testing and with Mckeith now sidelined with a hand injury Ansell was pressed into action at stand off. As the home team continued to drive at the Westcliff line the intensity of the contest over heated once more and players from both sides were drawn into an ill-conceived flurry of disagreement expressed by arms waved and thrust at each other. The cool-headed Wells ball carrier saw his opportunity and ignoring them all strolled through the unattended gaps left by the combatants. With order restored and the conversion added Westcliff's lead was now just 13-16 with a very long way to go. Back upfield went the visitors and when the defence transgressed once more Bannister assumed kicking duties and extended the lead to 13-19 which despite there being more than 20 minutes left to play remained the score until the end. During that final quarter both teams had opportunities to tick the scoreboard over, but defences remained as they had been for most of the day, on top!

**It was a very different performance from last week, the nature of the game was dictated by the elements it was a day for pragmatism to keep errors to a minimum and to take opportunities when they came along. We have to be very pleased with the win against a strong side who finished above us last season beating us deservedly home and away and who are much fancied this term. Again, it was a story of everything being left out on the pitch by the lads a monumental effort from all of them with perhaps a special mention for Vandermolen who was immense. Four games in we are in very good shape without yet playing as well as I believe we can which all in all is very encouraging. Next week Shelford visit The Gables who will be intent on kick starting their campaign after what has been a difficult start for them. Needless to say, we have other ideas and will be looking to build on our own excellent start.**

**Bannister, Merrick, Stol, Reynolds, Spivey, Mckeith, H Marrant, Weston, B Marrant, Brown, Scogings, Edwards, Vandermolen, Hatton, Smith REP Maloney, Marsh, Ansell**