

Westcliff 31 Brentwood 12

Westcliff continued to be dogged by injuries unavailability's and late withdrawals in the run up to their Essex derby with Brentwood but were able to select a side with just three key changes from the previous week. Out from the successful match day squad that won at Guildford were Weston, Oliver Jones and Maloney. While none of the existing injured players were fit to return Vandermolen and Stol did return to the group and Lane earned a call up in the front row. A predicted dip in temperature arrived on cue but it remained dry and firm underfoot. More of a concern was a stiff breeze that was primarily cross field but favoured the airport end.

The early exchanges were typically intense for a derby with both sets of players committed in defence and attack. The game promised at times to deliver moments of quality and precision but for the main part it flattered to deceive lacking fluidity and punctuated by interventions from the referee. Scores when they arrived were because of mistakes rather than moments of outstanding team or individual skill. It did though remain intense and absorbing throughout with the first score of the game going to Brentwood through a loose pass from Merrick on the Westcliff wing as he broke out of defence. Looking to keep the ball alive the inside pass looped not to a supporting team mate but a grateful Brentwood centre who made full use of the space and time he found himself in to cross the line and round to the posts. In response Westcliff began to assert themselves but despite creating half chances and nearly moments the final pass went to ground, or the wrong option was chosen. Nevertheless, as they persevered reward eventually came, Jones converted a penalty and that was quickly followed by a try from Merrick who redeemed himself for his earlier error by pouncing on a fumble to score. The successful conversion by Jones put the hosts 10-7 ahead and with 5 minutes of the half left that was extended to 17-7 when Rob Smith was on hand not only to tidy up an overthrown ball at the lineout but also to take it on at pace and crash over.

A 10-point lead at the break was welcome after the early setback but with the wind in Brentwoods favour in the second period it was clear there was still much to do. The intensity of the contest did not ease with both sides pushing hard but sustained pressure on the visitors line allowed Billy Marrant to score a third try converted by Jones quite early on. In the context of the game so far, a 24-7 lead looked to be significant and Westcliff were beginning to take firmer control of proceedings. However, what might have been a pivotal moment arrived soon thereafter and Merricks eventful afternoon had come to an end having received a red card after a midfield collision as he and a Brentwood player both attempted to collect a cross field kick. The decision looked harsh, a case of two players coming together when both were committed but clearly intent on the drop of the ball with neither player appearing to get off the ground. Whatever the circumstances it was a sickening collision and the Brentwood player clearly came off worse hopefully he will make a swift recovery. Both teams had had to contend with a yellow card, but Westcliff would now have to see out the game a man short which was still a significant time. Brentwood were able to make the advantage count by getting their winger over in the right-hand corner, but they were unable to capitalise further although

through no lack of effort. In fact, Westcliff returned to the visitors 22 and were confident enough to turn down 3 times a penalty shot at goal that would have extended their lead beyond two scores. Lucky for them that they made it pay the third time of asking with Marrant taking the ball over at the back of a driving maul for his second try of the afternoon. With the extras added the game and the bonus point was effectively secured. There was still a significant period of injury time to be played out, but Westcliff managed the game shrewdly and repelled further pressure when required to do so.

Five points is the most you can get, and we have to be pleased at doing so. We were not at our best, but we were certainly good enough. In some ways it was a typical derby but both sides to their credit tried to play rugby. In these kinds of games refereeing decisions tend to come under the microscope and certainly there were some frustrations out there from both sides in particular we were disappointed with the red card for Ross and we will consider how we chose to approach the hearing. We enjoyed hosting Brentwood and their followers they have settled well into the league and are a side who have come up with momentum ability and togetherness I think they will continue to do well. They are qualities easy to spot because we to have them ourselves in abundance and once again I am delighted with the effort commitment and at times quality on display from our lads. As we lick our wounds and prepare for the visit to Sutton next week we can content ourselves with the knowledge that we once again find ourselves at the top of the league looking down at everyone else.

Bannister, Spivey, Stol, R Smith, Merrick, Jones, H Marrant, Lane, B Marrant, Dellas, Dartnell, Edwards, Marsh, Hatton, J Smith REP Binstead Vandermolen Reynolds