

Westcliff 97 Shelford 7

On paper this was a game for which on current form unbeaten Westcliff were firm favourites to emerge victorious over winless Shelford. However, games are not played on paper and the margins between success and failure in this highly competitive league are often fine and Westcliff fielded a side with no less than six changes from the previous week. A double change in the front row handed starts to Dellas and Meakin whilst Dartnell replaced Edwards in the second row. At stand off Jack Jones returned for the injured Mckeith and Rob Smith made a first appearance of the season at inside centre, Sam Brown replaced Merrick on the wing.

After the wind and rain of the previous week at Tunbridge Wells, conditions returned to the balmy September sun enjoyed against Hertford the week before that. Westcliff started like a runaway train and left a shell-shocked Shelford stunned with Spivey playing on the wing completing a hat trick of tries in the opening 8 minutes, two of which Jones converted. Intensity allied with pace and width unlocked the visiting defence again shortly thereafter and the try scoring bonus point was secured as early as the 12th minute through Sam Brown, and it was hard to imagine that the game at this early stage was not already won. The scoreboard continued to tick over with converted tries added by Alex Hatton and Greg Bannister by which point the hosts lead 40-0. Some respite arrived after 35 minutes when Shelford exploited poor decision making in defence to score a converted try of their own, but it proved to be only temporary with Spivey adding a fourth try and Bannister a second. At half time the hosts led 52-7.

The second half was to play out much like the first with Chris Marsh scoring early and that try being followed by a quick-fire double from Josh Stol with two of those converted by Jones the lead had now been extended to 71-7. The last quarter continued in the same vein Bannister added a third try of his own and Spivey a fifth with Jones converting one of those and also a try of his own in between them both. There was still time for the most popular try of the game when deputising tight head prop Mat Meakin crashed over in support at the very end. With the conversion added Westcliff completed a comprehensive 97-7 victory and left the field to the applause of an appreciative home crowd to find that results elsewhere had catapulted them to the top of the league.

Shelford have not started the season well and are experiencing a testing run with injuries. It was a long day for them and one they will want to put behind them but for our part we were ruthless and clinical scoring 15 tries at this level is exceptional. The lads picked up where they had left off against Hertford in our last home game and that is very pleasing. Particularly so because we have made significant changes to the side over the last few weeks and demonstrated that our strength in depth is as good as we thought. To find ourselves after the first month of the season top of the table is a welcome surprise but the lads performances have merited it. The next test of their mettle will be the hardest yet when second placed and title favourites Wimbledon visit The Gables on Saturday.

Bannister, Brown, Stol, R Smith, Spivey, J Jones, H Marrant, Dellas, B Marrant, Meakin, Scogings, Dartnell, Vandermolten, Hatton, J Smith REP Marsh, Maloney, Ansell