

## **Bedford Athletic 18 Westcliff 17**

Injury and unavailability were to the fore again for a first ever visit to Bedford Athletic for a game to be played on their new AGP. In the backs Mckeith and Merrick were out of the country whilst prolific youngster Spivey commenced a loan spell at Blackheath. Stol failed to recover from injury but Westcliff were able to recall Rob Smith and Olly Jones. The unavailability of others in the extended squad meant that no recognised back took a place on the bench. The front 5 were unchanged but starts were handed to Marsh and Maloney in the back row.

Westcliff started the game in determined mood but failed to convert either of the two clear cut scoring opportunities created in the opening 5 minutes. No doubt encouraged by their profligacy the hosts began to assert themselves and opened the scoring with an unconverted try after 12 minutes. Westcliff went back on the front foot, but the side were not firing on all cylinders and whilst there was no lack of effort they flattered to deceive, poor decision making and execution let them down all too often. Scores were levelled after 20 minutes through 1-yard specialist Billy Marrant who burrowed over after a concerted series of drives at the line. Parity had been restored but the visitors were still not at the top of their game and the final 10 minutes of the half were pivotal to the eventual outcome. After 34 minutes a skilful chip recover and offload saw Bedford in under the posts with Bannister injured in the process of covering and having to leave the field of play. Trailing now 12-7 and with no back on the bench Marsh found himself shifted from the back row to patch things up. With things not quite in disarray but not going smoothly Westcliff conceded a penalty in the halves final play that the hosts converted to take a 10-point lead into the break.

In the early stages of the second half the away side were required to defend doggedly which they did and slowly they began to improve their all-round play and set about trying to dig their way out of the hole dug for themselves by themselves. The third quarter was scoreless, but they were getting closer, after 62 minutes Jim Smith slid over in the corner after sustained pressure and with 10 minutes to go they levelled the scores through a try from Reynolds who got on the end of a cross field kick from Jones. Having missed two previous kicks Jones drilled the touchline conversion through the uprights and Westcliff hit the front 15-17. The following few minutes were all Westcliff and a further score looked likely but failed to arrive. As the clock wound down Bedford pressed for a score but were met with solid defence it looked like their efforts would be in vain and Westcliff would sneak a win despite a lack lustre and problematic performance. That though was not to be the case, at a lineout some 40 metres out a penalty for a challenge for the ball that saw a Bedford player fall to the ground heavily was conceded. The kick at goal was always online and cleared the crossbar by the smallest of margins and Bedford led 18-17. The few moments of time that remained were not enough to force an opportunity to respond and Westcliff slipped to a disappointing defeat.

We were off key today and seemed unable to shrug off the malaise that affected us particularly in the 1<sup>st</sup> half. We should credit and recognise that much of that was down to the opposition, but we have to recognise as well that we didn't reach our normal levels. A

few things conspired against us injuries, key 50/50 decisions, the bounce of the ball etc, but the real disappointment is that we didn't play well enough to make them irrelevant. Losing late always hurts but the truth is we didn't do enough and for that we need to look to ourselves. We also need to take stock and look to the visit of CS 1863 next Saturday.

Bannister, Brown, Reynolds, R Smith, O Jones, J Jones, H Marrant, Weston, B Marrant, Dellas, Dartnell, Edwards, Marsh, Hatton, Maloney REP Scogings, J Smith, Vandermolen