

## Chingford 21 Westcliff 8

Having played very well against CS Stags the previous week Westcliff would have liked the rare opportunity to field an unchanged side for the trip to Chingford. Unfortunately, the merry go round of enforced week to week changes continued. Out of the squad for one reason or another went Rob and Jim Smith, Vandermolen and Reynolds. A host of others remained unavailable through ongoing injury issues so in came Edwards, Dellas, Spivey and Merrick. Conditions were foul, the pitch with significant areas of standing water playable at all due only to the efforts of a willing few who toiled away removing significant amounts of water. Nothing was going to make the pitch suitable for running rugby and what was to come in terms of quality and style was entirely predictable and didn't play into the visitors' hands.

Westcliff started the game lethargically while the hosts happier than the visitors to embrace the conditions had a greater intensity. In the opening 25 minutes they enjoyed the majority of possession and territory and were able to convert this through a try and two penalties into an 11-0 lead which in the conditions was significant. Gradually the visitors gained a foothold in the game and were rewarded with a try by Billy Marrant at the end of the half which brought them to within a score with the second period to come.

By now though the pitch was deteriorating by the minute and any effort to play expansive rugby was doomed to spectacular failure. A tight game played itself out with Westcliff now having a much firmer grip on proceedings and pressing hard regularly for a breakthrough. Their best efforts though failed through a combination of poor execution, appalling conditions and dogged committed defence. So, chances came and went until the final few minutes of the game. Having pressed hard for so long a deep kick out of defence from Chingford provided not only relief but also a platform when it was not fielded. From there they forced a penalty in front when the recent Westcliff replacement the only one of 30 souls who was distinguishable from all the others in a clean shirt was penalised for being in the wrong place. The 3 points extended the lead to 14-5 more than 2 scores with just moments left and it felt like it was all over. Westcliff though responded immediately and converted a penalty of their own which gave them one last opportunity to attack from the kick off and seek an improbable win. They did recover the ball and sought to drive their way back upfield but at the next breakdown the Chingford back row hacked away at the ball in the ruck which squirted free and he collected to sprint to the line while everyone else awaited the inevitable whistle from the referee. It turned out the referee didn't see it the way everyone else did the score stood and the game was done, Chingford deserved if slightly flattered 21-8 winners.

This was a very irritating performance our worst for quite some while. Conditions were unpleasant and difficult, but they were not a surprise and we didn't play them or the opposition well or even how we talked about. We were much better in the second half but couldn't make it count and suffered a bit of a sucker punch at the death. For the first time I felt we missed a few of the absent players some of our hardest carriers as we struggled to get over the gain line and the game plan went a little off message. Chingford were worth the win and good luck to them but at the moment we are playing well every other week we can and must do better.

Spivey, Brown, Stol, J Jones, O Jones, Mckeith, H Marrant, Weston, B Marrant, Lane, Scogings, Edwards, Marsh, Hatton, Dellas, REP Binstead, Anderson-Brown, Merrick