

## Westcliff 42 CS Stags 1863 7

Westcliff are in the middle of one of those availability and injury ravaged periods that all teams have to cope with and so again were forced to ring significant changes to their match day squad for the visit of CS Stags. In the pack three of the front five had to be replaced with Lane, Anderson-Brown and Scogings coming straight into the starting XV. In the backs Merrick remained unavailable and Bannister joined him after the hamstring strain that prematurely ended his afternoon at Bedford the week before. Back into contention though came Mckeith and Stol with the former starting and the later taking a place on the bench. On a grim grey December afternoon, the game got underway in front of a well lunched balcony many of whom had taken advantage of an open viewing of the clubs new facilities currently approaching completion.

The Stags enjoyed the lions share of possession in the opening few minutes but failed to make any significant inroads into the home defence. Instead Westcliff on an early incursion of their own to the visitors half set up a driving maul some distance from the line but drove hard infield covering the full distance to the uprights which were bent almost double by the impact as the line was reached and Marrant scored the try. The conversion was added the posts were straightened and the battle recommenced. Possession was traded back and forth but around the 13-minute mark a Stags runner hit a gap in the line, raced in under the posts rather more easily than he should have and the scores were tied up at 7-7. Parity though was short lived when just a couple of minutes later Oliver Jones was on hand to finish off a swift counter attack, younger brother Jack added the conversion. Now leading 14-7 the home team were still required at times to defend vigorously which whenever called to they did. After 35 minutes the defence forced a turnover and created a footrace for which there was only one winner as Jones approached the ball with the line at his mercy when he was tackled without the ball by a desperate would be defender. The referee didn't hesitate in awarding a penalty try and at half time the home side led 21-7.

Shortly after the restart Westcliff added a fourth try once more from a driving maul and scored by skipper Marsh. Jack Jones maintained his 100% accuracy from the tee as he did 10 minutes later after Rob Smith broke the defensive line to go in for another try. Now enjoying a commanding and decisive lead of 35-7 the game whilst still intense with total commitment from both sides drifted towards its conclusion. Stol added a sixth try around the 70-minute mark and Jones added the conversion once more to bring the final score to 42-7.

It was an excellent response to the previous weeks disappointment all the more so considering the changes forced upon us. The lads that came in were outstanding and all made a strong case to retain their place. There were one or two as well who under different circumstances might have been rested due to niggling injuries but who stepped up and did a great job. Our aim now is to take this form to Chingford next week, we are a tough nut to crack at home, but we have been found wanting in our two most recent away games and we want to put that right. With Wimbledon losing at Sutton we have made up ground on them and things at the top remain tight as the last two games of the year approach.

J Jones, Brown, Reynolds, R Smith, O Jones, Mckeith, H Marrant, Weston, B Marrant, Lane, Scogings, Anderson-Brown, Marsh, Hatton, Vandermolen REP Binstead, J Smith, Stol