

Westcliff 30 Tunbridge Wells 10

After an intensely combative contest the previous week at Hertford, Lane, Dellas and Spivey failed to recover from knocks in time to play whilst Jack Jones and Hatton were unavailable. Into the team came for the first time since early October Charlie Brown in the front row and returning too were the Smith brothers. Ed Johnson retained his place on the bench and was joined there by Binstead and Sam Brown. The players from both teams took to the field on a drab cold and windy mid-January afternoon, the wind at the backs of Westcliff for the opening half.

Assisted by the breeze the home side enjoyed the lions share of territory and possession and forced the visiting defence into conceding penalties within kicking distance. Two were calmly slotted by Mckeith in the opening 10 minutes although a third shortly thereafter slipped wide. The hosts continued to press and after fine work on the left skipper Marsh powered his way over in the corner. Mckeith slotted the touchline conversion and after the opening quarter Westcliff led 13-0. Around the half hour mark after sustained pressure on the visiting line Westcliffs patience was rewarded with Maloney crashing over. Mckeith managed to strike the ball against both uprights with the conversion attempt but the ball dropped the wrong side of the cross bar the lead moving to 18-0 but no more. Westcliff continued to pin back the visitors but they were, on occasion, able to mount purposeful attacks and from one such as the half drew towards a close turnover ball was kicked downfield and a foot race ensued. Two Westcliff players Bannister and Merrick out stripped the defence, Merrick arrived just ahead of his teammate to carry over and touch down. Mckeith converted and at the break Westcliff led 25-0.

Tunbridge Wells were to enjoy the assistance of the wind in the second period and Westcliff were keen to get the halves first score in the face of it. They did apply sustained pressure at the start of the half but failed to convert it into points. The visitors began to assert pressure of their own and were rewarded on the hour mark when patience and perseverance paid off and they created space on their right to get over. With 20 minutes to go they might have sensed an opportunity, but Westcliff continued to defend well for the main part and 10 minutes later scored a fourth bonus point securing try through an incisive break and score from Rob Smith. The game meandered to its conclusion with the result not in doubt despite occasional dummy spitting and handbag throwing. Tunbridge were rewarded for giving a 100% until the very end with a last play unconverted try and the final result was a satisfying 30-10 home victory.

A good bonus point win against dangerous opposition maybe a bit lackluster at times but with some good players unavailable for one reason or another and some others short on game time we managed it well. The most pleasing aspect of our season so far has been our ability to cope with enforced changes and that was evident again today. Everyone played a full part and contributed to a very solid bonus point victory. We will continue to need to call on the extended squad in the weeks ahead and we can be confident in doing so.

Bannister, Reynolds, Stol, R Smith, Merrick, Mckeith, H Marrant, Weston, B Marrant, C Brown, Scogings, Dartnell, Maloney, Marsh, J Smith REP Binstead, Johnson, S Brown