

## **Brentwood 17 Westcliff 34**

For some months Westcliff had eyed this Essex derby fixture in the knowledge that many of the squad would be unavailable due to a poorly planned stag weekend in downtown Benidorm. Chuck in a few regulation injured and unavailable players and the visitors were picking from the bare bones. So much so that the 2<sup>nd</sup> team fixture between the 2 clubs had to be rearranged. Nevertheless, all of the matchday squad had first team experience and they made the short trip to Brentwood in confident mood.

Westcliff had first use of the infamous Brentwood slope and having forced an early penalty soon took a 0-3 lead through the boot of Mckeith. That was short lived as the home team forced their way upfield and Burr responded with a penalty of their own for the hosts. Westcliff returned to the front foot and sent a further penalty attempt wide but struck with an opportunist try as the first quarter drew to a close. As Westcliff worked left to right in the home 22 a scoring pass was received by Vandermolén but was adjudged to have been narrowly forward. The home scrum creaked under pressure, but the ball was cleared to Burr who elected to chip out of the 22 in an attempt to turn defence into attack. Olly Jones was alert and received the ball on the run before returning a chip of his own to better effect which Bannister gleefully touched down. The conversion slipped wide, but Westcliff led 3-8. The contest remained hard fought ebbing and flowing with Westcliff carrying greater threat but failing to convert one or two crafted opportunities. Brentwood for their part applied regular pressure but also failed to capitalize. The visitors were disrupted by a yellow card for prop Brown but negotiated the 10 minutes without mishap and as the half drew to a close struck again. A kicking exchange forced Bannister to retrieve the ball on his own 5 metre line he shaped to pump the ball downfield but cut inside instead making good yards before shifting to Spivey who broke from inside his own 22 to deep inside that of Brentwood evading several tackles before offloading to skipper Marsh in support who put down under the posts. Mckeith converted and Westcliff lead 3-15 at the break.

A 12-point lead was welcome but not conclusive, and playing up the slope Westcliff were conscious there was much work to be done. Effectively they won the game in the next 15 minutes controlling territory and possession along with well taken opportunism to score 2 converted tries. The first from a concerted series of scrum penalties on the Brentwood line that produced a push over try for Vandermolén and then Brentwood ball went to ground in midfield and was pounced upon by Spivey who raced home from deep. Westcliff were now clear and in apparent control at 3-29 but no game is won with 20 minutes to go and Brentwood were rewarded with two tries reducing the arrears to 17-29 deep into the game as Westcliff allowed their levels to dip. Although momentum had shifted Westcliff were able to respond and began to control possession more effectively once more before sealing the win with a further try. Bannister broke out after a series of tight drives making good yards before getting dragged down. The ball was recycled swiftly by scrum half Marrant who dabbled the ball in behind the defence for Spivey to chase down collect and score. The game drew to a conclusion the visitors 17-34 bonus point victors.

**Given the circumstances, in particular with so many lads on foreign shores, it was a satisfying result and at times performance. It was not perfect, but the lads got the job done we remain in the title hunt and we move on to what might be a season defining home fixture against league leaders Sutton & Epsom in a fortnight. Hopefully half the team wont book a winter break in the meantime.**

**Bannister, O Jones, Spivey, Whiting, Merrick, Mckeith, Weston, B Marrant, Brown, Anderson-Brown, Dartnell, Marsh, Hatton, Vendermolen REP Macintyre, Webster, Harvey**