

Westcliff 32 Guildford 10

Having not had a game the previous week, Westcliff selected a match day squad with six changes from the one narrowly defeated at Wimbledon a fortnight ago. Some were returning from injury and some were to replace those with lingering knocks. In came Dartnell, Mckeith, Weston, Spivey and the Jones brothers. All eighteen selected graduated to senior rugby through the club's youth section. It was a grim chilly and very windy afternoon with overnight rain making the pitch heavy underfoot.

Westcliff began the game playing into the teeth of a driving wind but struck first within 2 minutes by forcing turnover ball and converting defence into swift counter attack. Possession for the visitors was lost midfield and a kick through by Hatton was capitalised on by Bannister, Mckeith drove the conversion low and hard into the wind and the hosts led 7-0. Only a few further minutes had passed when Charlie Brown was yellow carded for preventing a quick penalty inside the red zone and Westcliff were forced to defend resolutely as the wind and the visitors continued to drive hard at them. Their line was kept intact despite the best efforts of a committed Guildford team although around the 20-minute mark and with numerical parity restored they did eventually get over through lively standoff Hodgkinson. The successful conversion brought the scores level at 7-7. The game threatened to burst into life for most of the second quarter without quite doing so, broken up by frequent stoppages and occasional petulant exchanges between the players. The last 5 minutes though was a pivotal period, with in the first instance, pressure from the visitors forcing a penalty in front of the posts that allowed them to take a 7-10 lead. The response from Westcliff was immediate and decisive two tries, one converted, from Jim Smith and Ross Merrick, both the result of swift and ambitious attacks from long range. Westcliff headed into the break leading 19-10 having played into the teeth of a constant gale and content in the knowledge it would be at their backs for the second half.

In fact, the gale decided that for the most part it had had enough and dropped significantly for the remainder of the game. Notwithstanding this Westcliff remained in firm control and slowly built a score and stretched their lead. A penalty from Mckeith and tries from Billy Marrant and Chris Marsh took their points total to 32 with Guildford unable despite great effort to respond. In truth the 2nd half was unremarkable and for the most part forgettable. Further flashes of yellow for both teams and irritable outbreaks of disagreement aside, the rugby was rather ordinary not helped by the conditions and the game meandered to an inevitable conclusion.

It was an efficient win, a job well done in difficult conditions and circumstances, as a game it won't live long in the memory but its further evidence of our ability, consistency and depth we are very pleased with the lads. It's fair to say we are a little less pleased so many of them will be on a stag party in Benidorm for our Essex derby next week but that is both the nature and beauty of our club and something we will embrace and cope with.

Bannister, O Jones, Reynolds, J Jones, Merrick, Mckeith, Brown, B Marrant, Lane, Scogings, Dartnell, Marsh, Hatton, Smith REP Weston, Maloney, Spivey