

Westcliff 17 Bedford Athletic 13

There had been some hope and expectation that the rest week would allow minds and bodies to heal and create a few welcome selection dilemmas. In the event it was not so much a dilemma as a case of limited options in pulling the matchday squad together. Persistent injuries, alternative plans and as late as Friday unexpected child birth issues meant the team picked itself albeit with a few square pegs in round holes.

The match kicked off on a firm pitch and in benign conditions with the strong winds of recent weeks happily absent. From the outset the game was keenly contested with the visitors, who arrived in fine form and on a lengthy unbeaten run, first to threaten the scoreboard. They attacked from deep making good ground on the left wing before being tackled into touch. Westcliff successfully repelled that and further attacks and began to assert increasing control on proceedings. They began to control possession and territory and fashioned several opportunities none of which they managed to convert failing due to a combination of solid and determined defence allied with poor decision making and execution. Bedford continued to carry threat of their own and it was evident the game would be a tight affair throughout. The game in fact remained scoreless until the closing moments of the half when Westcliff turned over Bedford possession and relentless pressure saw Jim Smith get over close to the posts. Mckeith converted and the hosts had simply to negotiate the restart before heading into the break with a seven-point lead. Instead a ball that bounced free and found a Westcliff inadvertently ahead of the ball, forced a penalty that the visitors converted. Half time and Westcliff lead 7-3.

Unlike recent weeks there was no great advantage in playing in one direction or the other and it seemed likely that the second period would continue to be closely contested and so it proved. Bedford though started the better and threatened to take control with two quick fire tries in the opening 10 minutes, both well crafted and taken. Suddenly behind for the first time at 7-13, Westcliff had to respond. Going back on the attack they ran through several phases in the opposition territory before a late high tackle produced a yellow card for the visiting skipper and an end to the participation of a concussed Vandermolen. Mckeith guided home the resultant penalty reducing the arrears to 10-13 and Westcliff sought further reward. As the game entered the final quarter and still with a man advantage Westcliff made the breakthrough when lose ball at the breakdown was scooped up by Spivey who made a few crucial yards before deftly offloading to Reynolds who raced in under the posts. With the conversion added Westcliff lead once again at 17-13 but the game remained in a very fine balance. That balance might have shifted once more when Merrick also saw yellow for an uncompromising but not entirely legal tackle in the midfield. The momentum did swing, and Westcliff were required to see out the game on the back foot defending their narrow lead. See it out they did though to record an uninspiring but very hard-earned victory after a couple of recent narrow defeats.

It was a tough game that we are delighted to have won Bedford are a good side who arrived in good form and determined to add to our recent disappointments. We were stretched in key areas and had to be creative with a few of our selections, so the result was very welcome given we were never at our best. Full credit to Bedford for the way they pushed us to the hilt they have proved to be a great addition to the league after a slow start and we have had two very close games with them. Now our attention will turn to the trip next week to take on CS Stags where another stern test will no doubt await us.

Spivey, Brown, Bannister, Reynolds, Merrick, Mckeith, Marrant, Weston, Maloney, Binneman, Vandermolen, Dartnell, Marsh, Hatton, Smith REP Meakin, Anderson-Brown, Jones