

### **Dorking 26 Westcliff 33**

For the final game of the league campaign Westcliff travelled to Dorking who were secure in mid table but short on recent form. At stake was the unlikely possibility of securing the championship should Sutton fail to secure a single point at Bedford, but more realistically the possibility of a play-off fixture against Barnstaple. To claim that prize they would need to get a better result than Wimbledon at Tring. Injuries unavailibilities and overnight illness meant 5 changes to the previous weeks starting XV with Dellas, Dartnell, Maloney, Rob Smith and Oliver Jones all coming in.

In front of a bumper, last day of the season home crowd, Westcliff took control from the outset and raced into a 21-0 lead inside the opening 15 minutes with 3 converted tries. A series of patient short range drives saw Binneman touch down first and was followed by an incisive line break after good approach play by Bannister, Jim Smith added the third try. Dorking had barely seen the ball but when their opportunity arrived, they were able to apply some pressure of their own and did score an unconverted try. However, as the half progressed Westcliff remained very much in the ascendancy carrying the greater threat and despite being down temporarily to 14 with Billy Marrant in the bin scored again when breaking with pace from deep for Bannister to score his second try of the afternoon. This went unconverted but at the break Westcliff led 5-26 and had secured a try scoring bonus point.

The second half started much as the first had ended with Westcliff adding a converted try in the opening minutes through Jones who successfully chased and touched down from a Maloney kick to space in behind. Now leading 5-33 there was a very definite sense that the game was won and for the rest of the third quarter there was little to suggest otherwise although the competition remained honest and fierce from both sides. However just after the hour mark Dorking scored two quickfire tries to reduce the arrears to 19-33. Westcliff went back on the front foot and soon forced a kickable penalty which slipped wide, unperturbed they went back on the front foot as the clock marched on creating the space and opportunity to score on the right. However, the final pass was a little forced went to ground and was seized upon by Dorking who ran hard out of defence in behind the Westcliff cover to run the length of the field and touch down. Suddenly the complexion of the game had changed and with few minutes to go the crowd were a lot more interested and vocal. The visitors though responded and took play for those final minutes deep into the Dorking half where they retained and controlled possession to see the game out and secure a 26-33 win that rubber stamped a home divisional play-off against Barnstaple for the right to play National 2 rugby next season.

On another day we might take issue with ourselves over the late points we shipped but at the end of a long league campaign we are happier to dwell instead on a fantastic season. One in which we scored more points than anyone else conceded least and also won more bonus points. To have finished second is a wonderful achievement for us and is one of which we are very proud. There is a temptation to dwell on what might have been given the last play six-point swing against Sutton in March but every team in every season will reflect on those sliding door moments and much good it will do anyone. Congratulations to Sutton worthy champions who have won more games than anyone else and deserve their prize. We will move on to the play off against Barnstaple of whom we know nothing but we already look forward to welcoming them to The Gables on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

S Brown, O Jones, Bannister, R Smith, Merrick, Mckeith, Spivey, Dellas, Marrant, Binneman, Scogings, Dartnell, Maloney, Hatton, J Smith REP Lane, C Brown, H Marrant