

Westcliff 44 Barnstaple 5

Injuries last time out for Dellas and Mckeith kept both out of the last game of the season, the play off against Barnstaple for the right to play National 2 rugby next season. So unexpected at the start of the season in fact had a 27th game on the 27th been that Players Player Jim Smith and Coaches Forward Billy Marrant had felt supremely confident in booking overseas breaks. Westcliff were forced then to make 4 changes to the starting XV for the winner takes all clash. Restored to the squad were Marsh, Jack Jones, Weston and for the first time this season after just one run out since recovering from long term injury, hooker Jack Hopkins. The ground was dry and hard, but a strong wind blew straight down the pitch left to right with Westcliff playing into the teeth of it for the first half.

The home team were on the front foot from the start making light of the conditions and probing aggressively at the visiting defence. As anticipated the contest was intense with physicality high from both teams both with and without the ball. It was Westcliff though who were winning most of the battles and who were more dangerous with ball in hand. After a series of raids and attacks the breakthrough came after 10 minutes through elusive livewire full back Bannister. A second try was scored by Oliver Jones minutes later and Westcliff were in a strong position after a good start. Westcliff applied further pressure but were repelled by the visitors although not without conceding a yellow card in their front row. Before being able to take full advantage, Westcliff were also reduced to 14 with Binneman falling foul of the official. During this time the visitors mounted some determined attacks but were unable to score and instead as the final minutes of the half ticked by flanker Alex Hatton scored two quick trys and Westcliff despite being unsuccessful in testing conditions, with each of their conversion attempts, led 20-0.

As well as a decent lead Westcliff had the comfort of the wind at there back for the second half and were quick to take advantage of it with a second try of the afternoon for Bannister after 45 minutes. That felt like a crucial score, one which if it didn't quite make the game safe, established a 25-point lead from which Barnstaple would be hard pushed to recover. Ten minutes later Jones added a penalty and as the game entered the final quarter Bannister scored his third try and Westcliff were totally in control at 37-0. The visitors did cross for an unconverted try but Jack Jones rounded off the scoring with a try he went on to convert. The lead now was 44-5 and the remaining minutes of the game ebbed away, the final whistle brought scenes of jubilation and celebration for the National 2 bound home side.

The lads played very well today and their performance on the biggest stage was really pleasing. It was mature and composed, we brought intensity and discipline that took the game beyond the visitors grasp. There is no doubt that playing these games at home is a big advantage and Barnstaple had a long way to come but its no guarantee of success and we fully deserve both the result and the reward. Its been a long hard season but at the end of it these lads have produced the clubs biggest achievement and they should be both lauded and respected for it. Of course, we are also now faced with our biggest challenge and I don't think anyone is under any illusions about the size of that challenge, but it is one which we will embrace and tackle head on.

Bannister, O Jones, Reynolds, Smith, Merrick, J Jones, Spivey, Hopkins, Binneman, Scogings, Dartnell, Marsh, Hatton, Maloney REP Lane, Weston, S Brown, H Marrant