

## Bury St Edmunds 53 Westcliff 17

With half a dozen of the previous weeks squad unavailable for one reason or another, Westcliff rung the changes for the trip to Suffolk to take on Bury St Edmunds. The 160-mile round trip for our designated 'local derby', a sign of the new, elevated level at which we find ourselves this season. Out were Dartnell, Smith the younger, Marrant the elder, Kwassi, Maloney and Hogarth. In came Anderson-Brown, Smith the elder, Binstead, Webber, the evergreen Ben Jones and in the week of his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, Koomson. The 20-man squad fielded 15 players that have progressed to senior rugby through the clubs junior ranks and handed competitive debuts to Webber and Koomson.

Bury started the better on a blazing hot afternoon and were soon on the front foot. Westcliff competed tenaciously and effected the first games turnover but played a little too loose for a game just a few minutes old and returned possession to the hosts via a knock on. As Bury went back on the attack a penalty for a high tackle allowed them to kick to the corner and a well-executed catch and drive produced the games opening score. A repeat dose a few minutes later doubled their tally to give them an early 10-0 lead. Westcliff began to get a foothold for the first time in the game and pressure forced a penalty that Bannister converted. Back came the hosts who converted a penalty of their own and after the first quarter they led 13-3. The next 20 minutes were intense but unproductive, particularly for the visitors who had plenty of possession but struggled to make it pay. The last play of the first period produced the best moment of the game so far and was a bit of a sucker punch for Westcliff. They had disrupted the home scrum but when the ball was moved away an incisive line taken by the full back allowed him to make good ground in behind the Westcliff defence and offload inside to the supporting back row who scored under the posts. Half time and the hosts had a firm grip on the game with a hard earned but deserved 20-3 lead.

The opening 10 minutes of the second half went the same way as the first with two quick scores, the first created by more pressure from the forwards after another kick to the corner, the second from an unfortunate interception as Westcliff attempted to strike from deep. After 50 minutes and at 32-3 the game was effectively lost, and Westcliff were playing for pride in front of a boisterous home crowd and under an unrelenting sun. They continued to apply themselves and were able to conjure up the games best try, a length of the field effort that was finished off by Croft but owed much to the several pairs of hand through which the ball passed on its journey from one end of the field to the other. Bannister converted but immediately Westcliff were reduced to 14 for 10 minutes when Marsh got under the drop of a high ball and unintentionally eased out a Bury player competing in the air. Two more Bury tries followed to which Westcliff replied through Dellas powering over from short range. The last word though went to the home side who scored once more bringing the final score to 53-17 a hard earned but comprehensive win for them.

It was a tough day for the team and bit of an eye opener for some of the younger lads new to the level. Although there were areas where we were competitive, and the effort was unquestioned we didn't create enough and at times were too porous. Notwithstanding that there are positive things to take from the game and clear areas where we can and will improve. It's been recognised from the outset that it's hugely challenging for an amateur essentially home grown 1<sup>st</sup> XV like ours to compete in a semi-professional league. It's a challenge we are determined to confront and embrace.

**Bannister, B Reynolds, Smith, Whiting, Koomson, Croft, Bolton, Weston, Marrant, Binneman,  
Scogings, Anderson-Brown, Vandermolen, Marsh, S Reynolds REP Dellas, Binstead, Webber, Jones,  
Roussouw**