

Sutton & Epsom 21 Westcliff 17

Westcliff travelled to Sutton & Epsom seeking to break their duck for the season and record a first ever victory at Level 4. The teams had met six times in the previous three seasons with each club having both won and lost on three occasions. Westcliff were once again compelled to ring the changes with injuries and unavailability ruling out Hogarth, Webber, Binstead, Dellas, Kwassi and Mckeith. They were though able again to select the Smith brothers and Buster Reynolds whilst recalling Meakin and Whiting and handing a debut from the bench to Callum Lynch. Happily, the conditions were improved with the oppressive heat of the opening weeks absent and the ground underfoot more forgiving.

The London Premier champions started the game on the front foot, but Westcliff repelled the early advances and made strides up the pitch and opened the scoring after 5 minutes through skipper Marsh, Bannister added the conversion. Westcliff were too loose from the restart and returned the possession to Sutton through carelessness. They accepted the gift and applied controlled pressure for some minutes before spreading the ball wide left to a now undermanned defence. Bannister went for the interception and knocked on, the referee consulted the touch judge and awarded both a penalty try and a yellow card to the frustrated Bannister. Westcliff negotiated the shortage in numbers without conceding further and the contest continued in a ferocious but fair tempered and evenly poised game. As half time approached the Sutton flanker received a red card for a reckless and dangerous tackle and Bannister converted the resultant penalty, but almost immediately they made light of the set back by moving upfield and scoring a converted try through winger Ghumra. Despite being a man down the hosts led 14-10 at the break.

Westcliff began the second half positively and it wasn't long before after sustained pressure Jim Smith forced his way over for a try which Bannister converted to put Westcliff back in front at 14-17. In terms of further scoring there was none until the games dying moments, the game itself meandered with Westcliff failing to press home their advantage despite creating opportunities and Sutton dogged and relentless in defence whilst also creating moments of threat and opportunity of their own. In the last 10 minutes Westcliff appeared to be turning the screw and a Sutton defender was given the benefit of the doubt in similar circumstances as Bannister when knocking on. Then with just two minutes to go a Sutton player did receive a yellow card for foul play but still Westcliff were careless and turned over ball when their advantage was at its greatest. Sutton broke upfield pressed and in the 80th minute their centre slipped a tackle and crashed over under the posts. The converted try put the hosts back in front and although there was time for the game to restart there was not enough for the visitors to fashion a scoring opportunity and they had snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. Deep disappointment for them and jubilation for the hardworking hosts.

Another game, another bonus point, but also another missed opportunity. Commitment and effort as ever were not in short supply, but this was the most disappointing result and outcome so far this season. We had a lead and an advantage in numbers that should have enabled us to see the game out but for key periods in the second half we managed the game poorly most notably in the final 10 minutes when we should have put it out of their reach. We paid the price and it was a bitter pill, but we must own it and learn an important lesson. Attention will now turn to the visit next weekend of Bristol based Old Redcliffians.

Bannister, Triana, B Reynolds, R Smith, James, Croft, Bolton, Weston, B Marrant, Binneman, Scogings, Vandermolten, S Reynolds, Marsh, J Smith REP Meakin, Webster, Lynch, Whiting H Marrant