

Westcliff 27 Taunton 54

Westcliff were able to include again Greg Bannister for the visit of Taunton but remained unable to recall a host of senior players side-lined by injury or unavailability. Unhappily Bolton and Buster Reynolds joined that list since the trip to Bournemouth last week. Triana and Hughes were recalled to the starting fifteen and Dellas to the bench from which 17-year-old Ewan Richmond was to make his 1st team debut.

Despite heavy rain throughout the week the pitch was in a good state and conditions were bright and fresh with a modest but familiar breeze. As always, the opening exchanges were uncompromising and frantic. The visitors won the early arm wrestle and were first on the front foot scoring a converted after 7 minutes. Westcliff responded positively and drove into Taunton territory, from a maul they created an inside line taken by Triana who scored under the posts to bring the scores level. Several minutes later more pressure forced a penalty which Bannister converted and 10 minutes after that more concerted pressure saw Binneman barge over from short range, a try which was also converted to give the hosts a ten-point lead at 17-7. Taunton were bound to respond and launched a prolonged multi-phase drive which was defended by the home side with huge commitment and tenacity. Having defended more than a dozen phases on their own line Westcliff turned over the ball but the clearance kick was collected in space and the return down an exposed flank was decisive, the disappointment after such staunch defensive efforts was palpable. Back went Westcliff who again forced a kickable penalty which Bannister again guided between the uprights. With a few minutes to the break they held a hard earned and deserved 20-14 lead but in the final play of the half Taunton attacked again down their right wing. With half the defence appealing for a foot in touch and the other half for a suspiciously forward looking pass the visitors played to the whistle and reaped their reward when it didn't arrive. The conversion was the half's final act and sent the home team in 20-21 down.

Taunton started the second period well and scored after 6 minutes a fourth converted try to extend their lead to 8 points. The next 15 minutes ebbed and flowed in the same competitive and uncompromising manner until Taunton pounced on a dropped ball spilt in unsatisfactory circumstances to score once more under the posts. The nature of the midfield tackle left a very sour taste and warrants further scrutiny but be that as it may the visitors now led 20-35. Westcliff continued to take the game to the visitors and after 65 minutes youngster Hogarth scythed down the wing for a converted try to bring them back to within 8 points. That though was as good as it got and try as they might they could not force another opportunity and unhappily in the last 7 minutes as legs tired, Taunton run in three tries, two of which were converted. The final score a hard earned and deserved but slightly flattering 27-54 victory for second place Taunton Titans.

Despite the margin of defeat, it was an improved performance on the lack lustre showing at Bournemouth and one from which positives can be taken and improvements made. A lot of honest effort and endeavour and at times incisive and attractive rugby were pleasing. Also, a very accomplished cameo from young Ewan Richmond possibly debuting at an even more tender age than father Stuart. Shortcomings too though, and those will be the focus as the squad prepare midweek for the trip to Worthing.

Bannister, Triana, Hughes, Whiting, Hogarth, Croft, H Marrant, Meakin, Lynch, Binneman, Scogings, Dartnell, Vandermolen, Webber, Reynolds REP Richmond, Marsh, Kwaasi, B Marrant, Dellas