

## Westcliff 17 Old Albanian 19

Westcliff once again shuffled the pack for the visit of Old Albanian with some players becoming available once more, and others becoming unavailable. In came Binneman, Marsh, Vandermolten, Smith, Jones, Whiting and Weston who replaced in the squad Webster, Hughes, Webber, Binstead, Triana, Aldridge and Henry Marrant. It was a grey November afternoon but not too bitter, and the wind of recent weeks was largely absent. The pitch underfoot remained soft.

From the outset the contest was keen and fiercely competitive, as was to be the case all afternoon, there was little between the two teams. Each side probed in attack and repelled with determined defence. The home side were the first to get on the scoreboard, Binneman carrying hard off the back of a driving maul to score close to the posts. Jones in only his second appearance of the campaign converted. As the game entered the second quarter Westcliff elected to run back ball kicked to them but became isolated and conceded two cheap quickfire penalties. From the resultant lineout the visitors drove the maul over with the assistance of a few late arriving backs to get the job done. The conversion was missed, and Westcliff held a slender 7-5 lead. The game continued, committed and full on, tense and absorbing, but not quite thrilling. As the half seemed to be coming to an end without further scoring Westcliff had one final attacking opportunity and they made it count with Binneman once more crashing over under the posts. Jones converted and the hosts headed into the break with a handy 14-5 lead.

When the teams came out and the game restarted Westcliff were off the pace and caught napping. Immediately from the kick-off the visitors run from deep, kicked ahead, recovered and a couple of short powerful phases later scored by the sticks. A repeat dose arrived 5 minutes later, a penalty for laying on the ball gave Albanians position and a driving maul once again aided by late arriving backs crashed over in the corner. A well struck touchline conversion completed a transformation in fortunes less than 10 minutes in the making, the hosts 9-point lead now a 14-19 deficit. Westcliff still hadn't regained either their focus or composure and after 55 minutes Scogings earned a 10-minute breather at the referees insistence for a body check as a clearing kick was sent upfield. To their credit they regrouped and applied themselves at last. Defending when they needed to, they also began to return to the front foot and despite being a man short clawed back 3 points through the boot of Jones whilst holding firm in defence. Restored to a full compliment Westcliff went in search of a winning score in the game's final stages. As the light faded, they forced two penalties in the closing minutes but both attempts at goal crept agonisingly wide. Sensing their luck was in OA's escaped upfield controlled possession for the final couple of minutes and put the ball out on cue to take the spoils. A losing bonus point scant consolation for a disappointed home team.

A frustrating result in a game we allowed to slip from our grasp. The missed kicks at the death were the kind of opportunities you need to take in a tight game, but our downfall lay in the poor start to the second half. We surrendered the lead and the momentum directly from the restart and took too long to get back on track. In such a close game the error count will generally dictate the outcome and those we made hurt us more than those that they made, did them. We can acknowledge our effort and bemoan our luck, but we still need to make better decisions at key moments to convert near misses into wins. Our next opportunity is next week when we host first and last time visitors Redruth to The Gables in the final home game before the club is due to relocate to its new clubhouse and facilities.

Croft, Hogarth, Jones, Smith, Radzevicius, Bannister, Bolton, Dellas, Lynch, Binneman, Scogings, Dartnell, S Reynolds, Marsh, Vandermolten REP Whiting, B Reynolds, Marrant, Weston, Meakin