

## **Barnes 34 Westcliff 27**

Westcliff made five changes to the squad for the trip to south west London to take on Barnes, the majority enforced some elected. Out were Ben and Jack Jones, Campey, Hopkins and Barrett, in came Reynolds, Croft, Lynch, Scogings and Henry Marrant. Both teams had morale boosting victories the previous week and both were keen to back that up by coming out on a top in a game certain to be closely contested.

The pitch was soft and heavy after midweek rain but in the circumstances better than might have been expected. The opening 25 minutes were both frantic and absurd with defensive duties seemingly abandoned as each team run in three tries with the carnage starting as soon as the second minute. Barnes were first to strike, a Westcliff clearing kick in the shadow of their own posts was charged down gathered and grounded, the conversion a formality. Westcliff responded within 4 minutes through a try from Buster Reynolds after a midfield break opened up the home defence and Bannister converted. Two minutes later the Barnes scrum half took advantage of an inviting gap at a breakdown galloping through it to score far too easily. Again, the conversion was added but again Westcliff were level within a couple of minutes this time through Bannister who converted his own try after another incisive break opened the door. The game was now twelve minutes old and the scores were tied at 14-14. Shortly after Westcliff hit the front for the first time when Bannister converted a penalty but were soon behind again when they failed to learn their lesson and allowed the scrum half to once more dash home without anyone laying a hand on him. Once more Westcliff responded through a converted try this one by hooker Marrant less spectacular but of no less value and they led 19-24. For the remaining fifteen minutes of the half there was an outbreak of normality, defensive discipline apparently restored and the scoreboard was troubled no further, despite late try line pressure from Westcliff.

The opening twenty minutes of the second half were similarly unremarkable as both teams probed and pounded but found each other's defences significantly meaner. The only score in this period was a penalty from Bannister which extended the visitors lead to 19-27. As the final quarter begun the pivotal moment arrived when Bolton impeded a player taking a quick penalty and was sent to the bin. During his enforced absence the momentum shifted and Barnes with their tails up and a man advantage scored two tries one of which was converted and a penalty. The complexion of the game had changed, and Westcliff were unable to turn the tide or reverse their fortunes in the remaining minutes of the game during which there were no further scores, the game ended 34-27 in favour of the hosts.

It was a strange game and aspects of our defending as well as the final result were deeply disappointing. Surrendering up three tries in the first twenty minutes made our task impossibly difficult and when we were a man down and under the cosh in the critical period of the game those points cost us dearly. We did score three good tries of our own, but they just mitigated the damage rather than built a commanding position. We didn't play well enough in the second half and failed to impose ourselves in the manner we know we can when we are on our game. Frustratingly it's another game that got away from us and upon which we must reflect with regret but as ever we must move on and look forward. Next week Bury St Edmunds visit in the final game of 2019 after which the lads will get a break after a gruelling sixteen game opening streak and introduction to Level 4 rugby.

Croft, Hogarth, B Reynolds, Smith, Radzevicius, Bannister, Weston, B Marrant, Dellas, Vandermolten, Dartnell, Marsh, Webber, S Reynolds REP H Marrant, Meakin, Scogings, Lynch, Johnson