

Westcliff 22 Esher 17

Westcliff finally moved into their new home when official formalities were completed, albeit predictably late in the day and very last minute. Despite all the many necessary preparations going on behind the scenes minds were at last able to turn towards the approaching first time visit of Esher who, while the 1st XV had been toiling to defeat at Bristol, were easing to a bonus point victory against Old Albanians the previous week. The defeat at Clifton saw injuries to forward mainstays Binneman and Scogings as well as recent returnee Parmenter, each of them were therefore unavailable for selection. Additionally, Lynch and Hussey were unavailable but available once more, were Dellas, Jack Jones and Smith. Ben Jones was recalled to the bench and Jake Campey debuted at centre.

The game was less than a minute old and the immense new balcony not yet fully populated when Dellas collected his own clearance kick charge down to sprint a couple of feet to the line. A perfect start to the game for the eager hosts despite the conversion attempt drifting narrowly wide. Esher refused to be knocked off their stride and took just 5 minutes to reply through a penalty from fly half Locke. Westcliff quickly had an opportunity to respond in similar fashion but again, the shot at goal was narrowly off target. Five minutes later Esher scored through winger Booth who evaded the defence to score their first try, the conversion was successful, and the hosts early lead had evaporated. Instead after the first quarter they trailed 5-10. The game was highly competitive, each side vigorous and robust in both defence and attack although a rash of penalties against the home side limited their opportunities allowing the visitors to relieve pressure and on other occasions to apply it. Westcliff though did manage to reduce the arrears through a Jones penalty on 30 minutes and defended their line successfully when called to. At the break they trailed 8-10.

The first 10 minutes of the second half were dominated by the visitors who controlled possession and enjoyed the territorial advantage. Westcliff though gave no quarter and then began, once more, to ask questions of their own. Determined and patient drives at the visitors line forced the space and opportunity for Jones to exploit and touch down, he converted his own try and Westcliff had reclaimed the lead 15-10. Six minutes later they extended that lead through a well-executed try by Vandermolen who took the ball on the charge from a midfield break and delightful offload from Rob Smith. Jones added the extras to establish 22-10 lead and daylight, for the first time, appeared between the two teams. Esher threw caution to the wind and fresh blood onto the park and with twelve minutes remaining scored a converted try through replacement Bullett. At 22-17 the game was once more finely poised but Westcliff who were in no mood to relinquish their advantage defended manfully and ended the game on the front foot in the Esher half.

It was another excellent performance, the side starting life at the new Gables as they had finished it at the old one, by deservedly beating illustrious visitors. The team was better balanced this week, but it was a big occasion for the club and that can sometimes be a burden. Not so today though, the lads were on their game from the first minute to the last. For a while we got on the wrong end of the penalty count and invited pressure, but

we defended those situations magnificently and when we forged opportunities of our own, we took enough of them to deservedly win the game. The result moved us out of the bottom three albeit by only the slimmest of margins and confirmed once more that we can mix it up and compete with the company we are in. Next week we visit Banes in what will mark the halfway point of the season, we will go there with confidence and in the highest of spirits.

Bannister, Hogarth, Campey, Smith, Radzevicius, J Jones, Bolton, Weston, Marrant, Dellas, Vandermolen, Dartnell, Marsh Webber, Reynolds REP B Jones, Barrett Meakin, Hopkins, Johnson