

Old Redcliffians 28 Westcliff 36

The previous weekends win against a familiar Sutton side was a great fillip ahead of the equally important match against Bristol based Old Redcliffians on our first visit to them. The win though was not achieved without setbacks and short term injuries to Spivey and Webber kept them out. More disappointing was the news that backline linchpin Rob Smith would miss the rest of the season after midweek surgery. Scogings was unavailable but returning to the match day squad in their place were Johnson Marsh Marrant Reynolds and newcomer Luke Cummins.

The pitch had passed an early morning inspection a decision that was entirely justified but the going was certain to be very heavy and so it proved. The hosts hit the ground running, from the outset eager to impose themselves on the visitors. Westcliff toiled for the first ten minutes to limited effect, struggling initially with their execution and discipline. The hosts punished them after 11 minutes with a try under the posts for centre Baker who similarly struck again just 3 minutes later. With 15 minutes on the clock Westcliff trailed 14-0 and their prospects looked bleak in a game they needed to win. Respond they had to and respond they did, after 21 minutes Jim Smith was on hand, as he often is, to apply the finishing touch to a sustained series of drives. The conversion from Jones was successful as it was just a few minutes later when converting from the touchline his own try, one created by a crunching tackle and subsequent turnover from teenage winger Hogarth. The game was now a fierce contest one which ebbed and flowed in each sides favour, but no further scores occurred until the final minute of the half when Vandermolen crashed over to give Westcliff a half time 14-19 lead.

Westcliff took control of the game in the third quarter scoring two converted tries. First Jones broke a tackle made ground and fed Bolton on an inside support line and he touched down under the posts. Then as the home side forced a pass in an attempt to respond Campey picked it off and run in under the posts. Both tries were converted, and Westcliff had scored 33 unanswered points to lead 14-33 after the poor start. Their position in the game felt comfortable but a yellow card for Dellas for a technical offence offered Old Reds a hint of an opportunity and they were quick to capitalise on it with a converted try. A momentum shift? Perhaps, but Westcliff responded by driving upfield and forcing a penalty in front that Jones slotted to extend the lead to 21-36. Two scores ahead felt like enough with 10 minutes to go but in a game where tries had been scored in quick flurries Westcliff couldn't afford to relax, and the hosts were not minded to lay down. The last 10 minutes were uncomfortable but although Redcliffians got over once more for a bonus point try and a second yellow card was waved this time at Bannister they saw the game out to secure back to back wins for the first time this season.

Being 14-0 down after 15 minutes on a boggy pitch after a 4-hour coach ride is not a good place to be. It's a hole that takes a lot of getting out of and the lads showed a strong mentality as well as tremendous effort, commitment and at key times, quality. An excellent performance and an excellent result that puts a little space between us and the bottom three although with so much of the season still to go it's a gap that offers a degree of encouragement but no more. Next week we host Bournemouth a side that beat us

convincingly on the south coast in October and who arrive in a vein of form that suggests they will be no pushovers. Minds will focus between now and then on another vital game as we seek to create a little more daylight between ourselves and the relegation spots.

Bannister, Hogarth, Campey, Cummins, Bean, Jones, Bolton, Weston, Marrant, Binneman, Vandermolen, Dartnell, Lynch, S Reynolds, Smith REP Marrant, B Reynolds, Dellas, Johnson, Marsh