

Henley Hawks 29 Westcliff 5

The Henley pitch passed a mid-morning inspection and Westcliff set out for a first ever visit to the Oxfordshire side, with five changes to the previous weeks match day squad. Denied the services through injury and unavailability of, Dellas, Lynch, Webber, Spivey and Ansell, starting recalls were handed to Marrant and Vandermolen with Johnson, Meakin and Radzevicius called up to the bench. The team arrived late having been waylaid by a long motorway delay and conditions were everything that had been anticipated. Cold wet and windy, Storm Dennis not quite in full flow but certainly making its early presence felt.

For the second successive away game Westcliff failed to secure the kick-off turned over possession and conceded a converted try within 2 minutes. A difficult task was already harder, but Westcliff sought to respond and began to apply pressure, gaining both possession and territory whilst causing the home set piece some uncomfortable moments. Pressure though did not bring immediate reward and when the Hawks broke out injury and misfortune for the visitors saw the hosts score a further converted try. A clearing kick was charged down under the posts whilst the influential Vandermolen lay prone on the deck with an injury that ended his game. Westcliff did manage to cross the line with a charge down of their own but scrum half Bolton was ruled offside and it did not count. The final few minutes of the half again went against the visitors when in quick succession tight head prop Binneman departed with a rib injury hooker Marrant was handed a technical yellow card and Henley scored a third try wide left to give them a 19-0 lead at the break.

Westcliff resumed the second half with several minutes of the yellow card still to run but these were negotiated without conceding and as the game entered the final twenty minutes the first score of the half went to the visitors. Bolton touching down after a series of close quarter drives could no longer be resisted by the home defence. Henley fashioned a try wide left shortly afterwards that both secured a bonus point and in the absence of an unlikely reversal in fortunes made the game safe. Another try followed in the last play of the game as they secured a deserved 29-5 victory which saw them move to the top of the table with overnight leaders Taunton having had their game postponed due to the weather.

The lads worked hard in horrible conditions and as a group never gave anything less than everything. We were not able to fashion enough moments of quality to push a good side harder, and were undone by some injuries that knocked us out of our stride at crucial times. To be honest the rest week next week, can't come soon enough. The attrition at this level over a thirty game season is significant and problematic for a club of our model and size. All will be glad of the opportunity to take a breather and reset for the final block of games that will determine the outcome of our first season as a National 2 club.

Bannister, T Ford, Hogarth, Reed, Bean, J Ford, Weston, Marrant, Binneman, Scogings, Dartnell, Vandermolen, Reynolds, J Smith : REP Meakin, Johnson, Marsh, Hopkins, Radzevicius

Water Boy R Smith