

## **Westcliff 29 Worthing Raiders 34**

Injury and unavailability meant there were five changes to the starting line up for the visit of Worthing. Marrant, Vandermolen, Reynolds, Cummins and Campey were replaced in the match day squad by Dartnell, Ford and Reed plus Hopkins and Tyler Ford on the bench. Reed and youngster Tyler Ford were making club debuts. Storm Ciara had not yet arrived and although breezy it was mercifully dry.

Westcliff took the game to the visitors from the outset and the game was only three minutes old when success came through the quick feet of Reed who jinked his way past defenders to open the scoring. Ford added the conversion and Westcliff led 7-0, Worthing though were not slow in responding and created space and opportunity on the left to release a willing runner who scored under the posts. Westcliff took the setback in their stride and after twenty-two minutes released winger Bean to score on their own left. The conversion struck the upright and the hosts moved back into the lead at 12-7. That was reduced to 12-10 when the visitors converted a penalty on the half hour. As the half continued and the interval approached other opportunities came and went before Sam Reynolds drove over from short range after thirty-seven minutes. The conversion was good, and Westcliff held a hard earned but deserved 19-10 half time lead.

They started the second half equally as well as they had the first, Bean on hand to score after slick passing along the backs released him to score a bonus point fourth try. Leading 26-10 Westcliff continued to create opportunities but without quite taking them. However, as the final quarter commenced, they appeared to be in control and on course to record the double over the visitors. A lapse in concentration and discipline though invited pressure and soon a technical yellow card for Sam Reynolds was brandished. Immediately they were compelled to defend which they did to great effect turning over possession and creating the opportunity to exit the danger zone and take play upfield. Instead a poor kick lacking length and direction gave possession straight back to the opposition who carried back to score close to the posts. Now leading 26-17 but still a man down Westcliff forced play further up the field where they forced and converted a penalty to extend the lead back to 29-17 with 10 remaining minutes to navigate. Five of them went by without event but the final five exploded into a disastrous and bewildering landslide of 17 unanswered points to the visitors to win them a game they had rarely looked likely to. Converted tries after seventy-five and seventy-seven minutes followed by a penalty as Westcliff desperately sought to respond on seventy-nine minutes took the game away from them and it finished 29-34 to the visitors.

Truly this was a case of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory conceding seventeen points in four minutes takes quite some doing but regrettably we managed it. Publicly we will acknowledge the efforts and execution of Worthing but privately we will have to face and address the glaring lapses in discipline, concentration, and game management that cost us the win. The two bonus points we took from the game extended the gap to the bottom three, but that gap is not insurmountable if for no other reason than those clubs all have to play each other. With eight games to go there is still much to do.

Spivey, Hogarth, Bannister, Reed, Bean, Ford J, Bolton, Dellas, Lynch, Binneman, Scogings, Dartnell, Reynolds, Webber, Smith REP Ford T, Ansell, Weston, Marsh, Hopkins