

Old Albanian 10 Westcliff 16

Westcliff were keen to back up the good performance against lead leaders Tonbridge Juddians the previous week, with another one at Old Albanian on their first visit there. The home game had narrowly been lost by two points back in November when two penalties in the dying moments not to mention dying daylight slipped the wrong side of the uprights. Skipper Dartnell remained unavailable and other forward mainstays Dellas and Smith were also otherwise engaged. Weston and Vandermolten were recalled and slotted into the front and second rows respectively, and Barrett moved into the back row from the bench for a first start. In the backs Bolton started at scrum half for Spivey who moved to the bench, and Tyler Ford replaced the injured Bean, his place on the bench filled by Hogarth.

Although the going was understandably soft the pitch was in good condition and the modest intermittent breeze a relief from the storms of recent weeks. Old Albanian started the game on the front foot looking to assert themselves, which in terms of territory and possession, they did for the opening minutes. They failed though to trouble the scoreboard, the Westcliff defence applying itself resolutely when asked to do so, despite early indiscipline allowing momentum for the hosts, to be built through unnecessary or contentious penalties. Having weathered the early storm Westcliff started to ask questions of their own, gaining the ascendancy for the second quarter, controlling possession advancing upfield and forcing two penalties converted by Ford. A third opportunity was declined by an increasingly confident Westcliff who went instead to the corner seeking greater reward. Strong try line defence kept them at bay for some minutes, and when they felt they got themselves over the line the referee was on the wrong side to be certain. Subsequently a turnover followed, and the hosts escaped upfield having weathered a storm and probably leaving them satisfied to trail just 0-6 at the break.

It was clear from the outset that the game would be no try fest and that it would be tight from the first minute to the last. Westcliff were particularly disappointed then to see their hard-earned lead evaporate in the opening ten minutes of the second half. An early penalty from the hosts was quickly followed by a try for number eight Stonham which was converted to put them in the lead for the first and only time. Westcliff did not despair and struck back within five minutes, an adventurous cross field kick collected, carried upfield at pace, and moved to Bannister who scored in the corner. Westcliff's endeavour and ambition were rewarded again after sixty minutes when, after a prolonged period of pressure, Bolton sniped down the short side to score in the corner. Both conversion attempts failed but with twenty minutes to go Westcliff had restored their six-point lead. The next period saw moments of high drama as kicks were charged or chased down, the action moving from one end of the pitch to another with seemingly one team and then the other certain to score but failing to do so. As the seventy-minute mark arrived Westcliff were handicapped by the loss of Binneman who was required to take a ten-minute breather by invitation of the referee. Westcliff were stretched as the hosts turned up the heat but navigated the final minutes to secure a satisfying and important victory.

It was really pleasing to get the win today, not least because of its importance in our aim to secure our National 2 status, but also because the defeat at home in November had been rather galling. We had to make a few changes today but backed up the performance last week and got the win we deserved. It's a huge four points that we have banked as we take the opportunity to recharge batteries and, hopefully, recover from various knocks during the break week. When we return to action the week after we travel to Cornwall to meet in form Redruth who no doubt still smart from the defeat, we inflicted on them on the memorable day we left the old Gables back in late November.

Reed, Bannister, Campey, Jones, T Ford, J Ford, Bolton, Weston, Marrant, Binneman, Scogings, Vandermolen, Barrett, Webber, Reynolds REP Spivey, Hogarth, Lane, Lynch, Johnson