

Westcliff 12 Tonbridge Juddians 19

Westcliff made eight changes for the visit of promotion seeking Tonbridge Juddians, mostly enforced through injury and unavailability, but a few elected, with players returning. Out of the squad that went to Henley were skipper Dartnell, Vandermolen, Weston, Hogarth, Johnson, Meakin, Marsh and Radezvicius. Into the starting XV came Dellas, debutant Stol, Webber, Spivey, Jones and Campey. Onto the bench came Lynch and teenager Barrett. Despite the best efforts of storms Dennis, Ciara and Jorge, the club pitches had held up well and unlike elsewhere the game was never in any danger of not going ahead. In fact, the sun came out for the afternoon and the rain stayed away, however the wind did not and there was a gale blowing throughout more or less straight down the pitch.

The visitors had the wind at their back for the first half, but Westcliff defied the elements to force their way deep into the Tonbridge half from the kick-off. Retaining the ball well they patiently probed the defensive line moving right then left then back again before a well weighted and directed grubber from Ford was collected by Bean who scored under the posts after just 3 minutes. In truth they spent much of the rest of the half defending ferociously which they did to a man. However, the wind made it desperately difficult to move upfield and unrelenting pressure meant that Tonbridge were able cross the line twice. The first through a chip chase and touch down from winger Watson after fifteen minutes, the other a snipe by scrum half Walsh afforded a little too much opportunity to slip through a defensive gap after thirty one minutes. The first of these was converted and the visitors led 7-12 at the break, a position with which the hardworking hosts were not too despondent.

The second half was an equally intense one but with Westcliff enjoying more possession and field position than the first. However Tonbridge were playing the conditions well, adopting a tight game with their big forwards they were able to drive upfield with ball in hand to both relieve and create pressure more successfully than Westcliff had. Nevertheless, Westcliff were beginning to ask questions but were rocked back on their heels by a break away try, a second for Watson. Westcliff attacked a defensive scrum on the visitors twenty two but although in apparent disarray at a retreating scrum the number eight picked up shaped to shift to support but instead made good ground through a gap down the narrow side before releasing to the flying winner who outstripped the scrambling defence to score under the posts. With twenty-five minutes left Westcliff were down 7-19 and needed a response. Before they were able to though they first had to withstand considerable pressure and they spent several minutes doing just that. The defensive efforts eventually forced a turnover and a kick in behind was chased down by acting skipper Bannister who scored in the corner. Westcliff were back within a score at 12-19 and were still seeking a positive result. The big chance to draw level came when Bannister dashed through a gap making it almost to the line when a desperate lunging tackle from behind hauled him down and the ball went forward in contact. Instead of a draw or better Westcliff had to settle for a losing bonus point.

A useful point in the battle to retain National 2 status but less than we might have got if one or two key moments had fallen one way rather than the other. Linger on what might of been though isn't our way and there are other positives to take from the game too. The conditions were not great, but the game was compelling and intense with moments of quality from both sides. The effort and commitment was spot on throughout, from minute one to eighty. More performances like this will bring reward in the weeks to come and help us achieve our objective.

**Reed, Bannister, Campey, Jones, Bean, J Ford, Spivey, Dellas, Marrant, Binneman, Stol, Scogings,
Reynolds, Webber, Smith REP Hopkins, Lynch, Barrett, T Ford, Bolton**