

Barnstaple 34 Westcliff 17

The second round of National 2 league fixtures saw a much-changed team embark on the early morning cross country trek to North Devon for a first ever visit to Barnstaple. Into the starting pack came Lynch, Dane, Johnson and Webber for Marrant, Weston, Vandermolen and Reynolds. In the backs the unavailable Jones, Hogarth and Ajeigbe were replaced by Smith Koomson and on the bench Sexton and Duplessis. The west county weather was fine, and the game kicked off in bright sunshine.

Westcliff knocked on when receiving the kick-off and from the resultant advantage the hosts attacked with purpose which forced an early penalty converted in the 2nd minute. Westcliff responded by driving into the attacking third and a penalty soon followed from which Bannister levelled the scores. Westcliff returned to the front foot and probed at the home defence but were less than effective and these thrusts were repelled. As the half progressed, the momentum and initiative were seized by the hosts who whilst unable to score tries nevertheless slotted a further 4 penalties to establish a 15-3 half time lead.

Westcliff needed to start the second period strongly to arrest the penalty count disparity and erode the scoreboard deficit. Instead after just 42 minutes Scogings was harshly penalised at the break down and on a totting up basis sent to the bin for 10 minutes. Barnstaple added the 3 points and five minutes later followed it up with the games opening try by stretching the outnumbered defence to breaking point. They added a second unconverted try mid-way through the half to establish a dominant 28-3 lead. Westcliff were not having a good time, behind on the scoreboard and struggling to get their game together they were further hindered by injuries to influential players Binneman Smith and shortly after coming on Marrant. All three had to leave the field of play with injuries likely to rule them out in the short term at the very least. However, they did at last get the home side on the back foot by scoring two quick fire tries through Bannister who also converted both. Suddenly within two scores their tails were up and for the first time a little home team anxiety was palpable. However, an unlikely comeback was not to be, and Barnstaple scored a third try to establish a 35-17 lead which was how the game finished shortly afterwards.

It was a difficult and disappointing afternoon, we went into the game having made more changes than we would have liked, and others were forced upon us throughout the game. We never got out of second gear unlike Barnstaple who responded very well to a bruising opening day defeat. It's a game from which we will move on quickly as our minds turn to the visit of Leicester Lions next week.

Bannister, Koomson, Campey, R Smith, Ford, Cummins, Coetzee, Lane, Lynch, Binneman, Dane, Scogings, Johnson, Webber, J Smith REP Richmond, Sexton, Du Plessis, Miller, Marrant