

Westcliff 7 Henley Hawks 36

Like clubs and down the land Westcliff bemoaned and reflected on the extraordinary length of their injury list as they contemplated the visit of Henley Hawks. A problem foreseen and predicted as rugby emerged from its extended hiatus but nonetheless one that provided an unwelcome strain on the strength and depth of their playing resources. Eight players came into the match day squad, a smattering of debutants and veterans including Barnett, Anderson-Brown, Hussey, Comber, Ford, Whiting, Redding, and Willsher.

Both teams observed a minute's silence before the kick-off in memory of former 1st XV captain Tony Brown who had so recently been struck down by a fatal heart attack at the age of just 52. Conditions were cold wet and windy and remained that way for the duration.

Henley pressed from the outset but were consistently repelled by a dogged home defence who made occasional forays into Henley territory but without any reward. It took 27 minutes for the illustrious visitors to break the deadlock a score that was not undeserved but one for which they had had to work harder than they would have liked or might have anticipated. The try was converted, and the game resumed the same pattern, Henley applying pressure and dominating territory whilst the hosts defended with commitment and vigour seeking to test and probe the visitors in defence whenever possible. No further score arrived until the 39th minute when Henley scored a second try and headed in at the break to towel down and dry off with a 0-12 lead.

The game was competitive, and Westcliff were in it, but the third quarter saw the game go away from them quickly. Two tries in the first 10 minutes of the half saw Henley establish a 0-24 lead and secure a try scoring bonus point. Two further tries in the final quarter sandwiched the home sides best moment when 18-year-old debutant George Willsher chased down a kick and was on hand to collect and dot down the ball under the posts following a defensive fumble.

The final score of 7-36 was fair but hard earned by the visitors. A performance, if not a result, that we could take plenty of positives from. The lead up to the game was difficult as injuries continued to bite, stretch, and undermine the squad, and the best efforts of all. We had to bring a lot of lads into the team, some of whom had never played for the 1st team before, others who hadn't done so for several years, and most of whom hadn't previously played the level. The application and commitment from everyone was a credit to themselves and each other, and for the club was both encouraging and immensely satisfying.

Hogarth, O'Brien, Cummins, Whiting, Ford, Bannister, Comber, Weston, Lynch, Lane, Anderson-Brown, Barnett, Dane, Hussey, Webber REP Ajeige, Marrant, Redding, Miller, Willsher