

Rochford 28 Westcliff 17

For the long-anticipated visit to local rivals Rochford, Westcliff made six changes to the match day squad. In came Lynch, Maloney, Coetzee, Gladdish and for the first time on debut Paul Slater plus returning from early season injury Billy Marrant on the bench.

On a damp and overcast afternoon the clubs resumed a long-standing rivalry that for 10 years or so had disappeared from the fixture list as they competed at different levels at different times in the league structure. The game was predictably very keenly contested and compelling throughout but without quite ever becoming a wonderful spectacle.

Rochford struck early forcing a penalty they kicked to the five-metre line and drove over from the resultant lineout, the conversion was added. Most of the rest of the half was punctuated with nearly moments as the sides traded periods of possession and territorial advantage without worrying the scoreboard. Westcliff had several opportunities, hard earned and occasionally well-crafted but these moments all frustratingly slipped away. This was primarily through poor final execution, most markedly at several lineouts after pressure forced final third penalties. The reluctance to kick for goal and the inability to capitalise at these moments came back to bite them as in the final moments of the half Rochford camped on the five-metre line and forced a scrum which under pressure wheeled and went to ground. The referee was confident a try scoring opportunity had been denied and without hesitation awarded a penalty try. At the break, the hosts led 14-0.

Westcliff began the second half well and were rewarded for their efforts when an interchange between Ajeigbe and Bannister allowed the skipper to stride away and cross the line for a try which he then duly converted. One penalty attempt at goal was missed but a second was not, the scores closed to 14-10 and the game was in the balance. Both teams had moments, but Westcliff again spurned opportunities while Rochford forced their way up field and scored a converted try on 70 minutes. There remained time for the game to be won and lost by either side but the balance tipped in favour of Rochford when their replacement winger struck from deep just a few minutes later to establish a 28-10 lead. Westcliff were able to score again when try line pressure and patience allowed them to release winger Hogarth for a try that was then converted, time though was up, and the win went to Rochford 28-17.

It was a committed and closely thought contest which might have gone either way, but which Rochford seized through better execution at the important moments. We failed to win the game because one aspect of our performance was inadequate. That's disappointing and frustrating but also there is no need to scratch our heads and wonder what went wrong. A problem known can be fixed. So, the last game of the year and the first half of a challenging season complete. It has been tough with some self-evident lows and some less obvious but welcome highs. Quite what 2022 will bring and when remains to be seen.

Bannister, Hogarth, Slater, Gladdish, Ajeigbe, Whiting, Coetzee, Brown, Lynch, Binneman, Anderson-Brown, Scogings, Dane, Johnson, Maloney REP Ford, Longhurst, Lane, B Marrant, Doyle