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Dan Jones Hat Trick Brings Christmas Cheer For Sutton & Epsom Rugby

22 December 2025



Sutton & Epsom RFC 61 Old Reigatian 17. Saturday 20th December.

On Saturday 6 January 2024 Old Reigatian had secured a hard-fought 28-26 victory over Old Colfeians to go top of Regional 2 South East. Since then, however, their form has faltered and they arrived at Rugby Lane still searching for a first league win of the campaign. Despite that, there was a degree of optimism for the visitors, with Sutton and Epsom themselves enduring a run of five straight defeats, albeit tempered by a remarkable ability to collect bonus points along the way. That run came to an emphatic end as the Black & Whites produced a dominant display, scoring nine tries in a 61-17 victory and leaving Old Reigatian rooted to the foot of the table over the Christmas period.

Kyren Ghumra and Kieran Finney returned to the Sutton and Epsom starting XV and, on a mild winter afternoon at Rugby Lane, Billy Egleton’s whistle set the game in motion. Sutton and Epsom needed only three minutes to open the scoring. From a line-out, Rob Hegarty and Josh Rea carried into the 22 and Dan Jones was rewarded for his support play with the first of his three tries. Freddy Bunting converted. Five minutes later a charged-down clearance led to another Sutton and Epsom line-out on the 22, the forwards drove on before the backs were released and a set move created space for Ghumra to stroll in at the corner. Bunting’s conversion from the touchline made it 14-0.

Old Reigatian briefly threatened a response after earning a line-out deep in the Sutton and Epsom 22, but a wayward pass squandered a rare opportunity. Sutton and Epsom immediately made them pay. Following a long clearance and penalty, a line-out 30 metres out saw Dan Johnson, Gareth O’Brien and Boaden carry strongly before Ghumra claimed his second try. Bunting added the extras for 21-0.

The first quarter ended with Sutton and Epsom claiming the bonus point. Adam Bibby countered deep into Reigatian territory, supported by Tom Lennard, and sustained pressure eventually saw lock Kieran Finney force his way over. Bunting converted for 28-0. On the half hour Hegarty made a trademark break from turnover ball and once again Jones was in perfect support, accelerating away to score from outside the 22. The conversion made it 35-0.

Old Reigatian were rewarded for their persistence just before the break. Playing their best rugby of the half, they earned successive penalties five metres out and lock Dan Grant eventually powered over. The conversion missed, making it 35-5. Sutton and Epsom responded immediately. Hegarty broke again and passed to Josh Rea, whose well-timed angle cut the defence before offloading to Sam Lennie. Hauled down short, the ball was recycled and Gareth O’Brien stepped through to score Sutton and Epsom’s sixth. Bunting converted to give Sutton and Epsom a commanding 42-5 lead at half-time.

Any fears of a second-half collapse were quickly dispelled. Although Reigatian defended stoutly for the opening ten minutes, Sutton and Epsom’s seventh try arrived from a five-metre line-out when Ewan McTaggart fed Dan Jones for his hat trick. Bunting converted for 49-5. The game opened up, and while Sutton and Epsom occasionally kicked possession away, they continued to dominate. Late in the third quarter, after Steve Munford gathered a loose ball following an ambitious Reigatian chip, sustained pressure ended with Tom Lennard scoring. The conversion was missed, leaving the score at 54-5.

With ten minutes remaining Sutton and Epsom added their ninth try. Sam Lennie, outstanding throughout, emerged from a mass of forwards to touch down, with Bunting converting for 61-5. Old Reigatian, however, showed commendable spirit. A loose pass on halfway was seized upon by scrum-half Jack Nicol, who ran in untouched, and although the conversion was missed it sparked renewed confidence. Moments later, slick handling saw Jonny Bridges score in the corner, with Conor Woods converting to make it 61-17.

A late yellow card for Ewan McTaggart gave the visitors a numerical advantage in their search for a bonus point, but no further scores followed. The final whistle confirmed a comprehensive Sutton and Epsom victory, capping an impressive all-round performance from the Black & Whites as they closed the year on a high. Sutton and Epsom will now hope to replicate last season’s strong finish, with added incentive from a complex play-off system, while Old Reigatian continue their search for a first win.

The league now pauses for the Christmas break. Sutton and Epsom will reflect on an excellent early-season run before injuries and form intervened, and league action resumes on 10 January at Horn Park against Old Colfeians.

Sutton and Epsom: O’Brien, Scott, Bibby, Bunting (c), Ghumra, Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Lennie, Boaden, McTaggart, Finney, Rea, Jones, Hegarty. Replacements: Howes, Duey, Symonds.

Old Reigatian: Allen (c), Coyle, M. Nicol, Holder, Bridges, Woods, J. Nicol, Garrec, Nestor, Marshall, Grant, Franklin-Talbot, Pease, Bye, Mendoza. Replacements: Monk, Burton, Blake.

John Croysdill

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Photo credit: Robin Kennedy

Late Penalty Breaks Epsom Hearts in 34–33 Thriller

22 December 2025



Dartfordians 34 Sutton & Epsom RFC 33 Saturday 13th December.

The midpoint of the campaign has been reached and the return journey has begun in Regional 2 South East. In Round 2 back in September, the Black & Whites hosted Dartfordians and snuck home by 33–29, with Rob Hegarty scoring a hat-trick. Sutton & Epsom had led 33–17 with five minutes to go and were no doubt grateful that there were not five more minutes to play. While the hosts then sat just a solitary place above winless Old Reigatian and the visitors were nestled in fourth spot, S&E arrived in Bexley on a run of four successive defeats. Added to this were the usual seasonal effects of wear and tear, and few were anticipating a comfortable afternoon. So it came to pass that Dartfordians won 34–33 with the final kick of the game.

Sutton & Epsom fielded 11 players from their September squad. Niall McCormack made his debut from the bench and Angus Nelson, having his first outing of the season, kept him company, while Matt Symonds made his first appearance of the campaign on the wing. Dartfordians were marginally more settled, with 12 of the 18 who appeared at Rugby Lane also taking part, though Jarlath Hetherington was once again a notable absentee. Traffic accidents and congestion delayed the kick-off until 2.15pm, and disaster struck Sutton early when an interception allowed centre Harvey Whyte to run in from his own half. The conversion was missed but Dartfordians led 5–0, playing up the slope.

The early setback was compounded when S&E flanker Dan Jones' return from injury lasted less than ten minutes. Undeterred, Sutton took the lead when Tom Lennard made the initial break and the Black & Whites exploited an overlap for Matt Symonds to score with his first touch. Freddy Bunting converted to edge Sutton ahead at 7–5. It was the start of a topsy-turvy encounter, with the lead changing hands repeatedly. On the half-hour mark, Dartfordians regained the advantage after sustained pressure forced Sutton onto the back foot. Despite strong defence, with Lennard prominent, a poor clearance led to a catch-and-drive from which prop Louis Chapman scored. Tom Gubby converted for a 12–7 lead.

Within five minutes Sutton were back in front. A superb break from Bunting, well supported by Gareth O'Brien, took S&E to within five metres, and from the ensuing penalty the forwards took charge. Despite valiant resistance, prop Tom Boaden forced his way over, with Bunting again converting to make it 14–12. From the restart, winger Jack Bunce was rewarded for his kick chase as Bunting lost possession in the tackle. After heroic defence denied full-back Joe Scott, it was captain Kieran Clarke who eventually scored from a five-metre scrum. Gubby converted to restore Dartfordians' lead at 19–14.

There was still time for one more score before the break, and it went Sutton's way. O'Brien initiated a counter-attack from inside the Sutton half and the Black & Whites produced their best attacking rugby of the half, advancing through multiple phases to reach five metres out. A retreating Dartfordians defence conceded a penalty, which O'Brien took quickly, weaving his way to the line with pace and skill. Bunting added the extras and Sutton led 21–19 at the interval. After a breathless, see-sawing first half, it would have taken a brave soul to predict the final outcome.

The visitors broke the pattern ten minutes into the second half. A superb break by Adam Bibby almost brought a try, but excellent cover defence denied him. Hegarty and Sam Lennie continued the move and S&E appeared to have scored, only for the referee to rule the final pass forward. That disappointment was short-lived, as play was brought back for a Sutton penalty. Slick back play then provided Symonds with his second try of the afternoon, and Bunting's magnificent touchline conversion extended the lead to 28–19.

Five minutes later Dartfordians responded. A series of penalties forced Sutton deep into their own 22 and, after multiple phases of determined forward play, centre Harvey Whyte powered his way over. Gubby converted to reduce the deficit to 28–26. Both sides had now secured their try bonus point as the game entered its final quarter, with everything still to play for.

A pivotal moment followed when Bibby was yellow-carded for a high tackle as he chased down a long clearance. In such a tightly contested match, ten minutes with a numerical advantage proved crucial. Sutton dug deep, monopolising possession and running down the clock, but Dartfordians eventually forced their way back into the S&E 22. Another penalty piled on the pressure, and from a catch-and-drive the ball was released for flanker James Garvey to squeeze over in the corner. The difficult conversion was missed, but Dartfordians were back in front at 31–28.

With some irony, the referee then reduced the home side to 14 just as Sutton returned to a full complement. It appeared

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the Black & Whites had missed their chance when a harsh pass to Symonds resulted in a knock-on, but they were rescued by a colossal scrum effort that earned a penalty. Sutton camped on the line as Dartfordians' defence held firm, twice denying Lennie within inches of the line. From the drop-out, Sutton surged back again and were awarded a penalty in front of the posts. Declining the draw, they kicked to the corner, and from the line-out the pack ushered Lennie over. Bunting's kicking had been immaculate all afternoon, so it was a surprise when the conversion drifted narrowly wide, but Sutton led 33–31.

There was still time for the restart. As so often, Sutton proved most vulnerable immediately after scoring. Almost inevitably, Dartfordians were awarded a penalty. In a moment of intense drama, Tom Gubby held his nerve and landed the decisive kick. It was agony for the men from Rugby Lane and pure ecstasy for the Kent crowd. With no time remaining, Dartfordians had won 34–33.

The lower reaches of the table are tightly congested and, after several near misses, Dartfordians finally emerged on the right side of the scoreline. Aside from the interception, their four tries came from excellent forward ball-carrying, with a physical and committed pack posing a constant threat from attacking line-outs. With Old Reigatian now 25 points adrift at the bottom, Dartfordians will look upwards with optimism, as the next three teams are within two points.

This was a painful defeat for Sutton & Epsom. They regained the lead on four occasions, scored five tries and have accumulated the most bonus points in the league with 14. Errors, whether missed kicks to touch or costly penalties, handed Dartfordians valuable territory and attacking platforms. To snatch the lead in the dying moments only to concede a penalty from the restart made this the hardest defeat of the season to bear.

Next Saturday at 2pm, Sutton & Epsom host Old Reigatian in their final league fixture of 2025. The visitors are enduring a tough campaign, one that Rugby Lane supporters of a 2011–12 vintage will recall with empathy. The Black & Whites will hope their Christmas charity does not extend to gifting the Old Boys their first win of the season. Such is the cyclical nature of rugby that the side from Geoffrey Knight Fields topped Regional 2 South East as recently as 6 January 2024.

Sutton & Epsom:
O'Brien, Symonds, Bibby, Bunting (c), Scott, Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Lennie, Boaden, McTaggart, Duey, Rea, Jones, Hegarty.
Replacements: Howes, Nelson, McCormack.

Dartfordians:
Scott, Kpaka, J Taylor, Whyte, Bunce, Gubby, M Taylor, Garrett, Hooban, Chapman, Adams, Chandler, Garvey, Clarke (c), Wright.
Replacements: Clayton, Rackley, Chappell.

John Croysdill

Image – action from a previous fixture – Robin Kennedy

Epsom's Five Tries Not Enough to Halt Brighton Charge

22 December 2025



Sutton & Epsom RFC 33 Brighton 43. Saturday 6th December.

Brighton is one of Sutton & Epsom's oldest fixtures dating back to 1897. The arrival of Brighton also marked the midpoint of the campaign with Round 11 of 22, with the men from Sussex being the last opponent to face the Black & Whites. So it was appropriate that there was a curtain-raiser as an appetiser before the main course. A thrilling junior match concluded with the S&E XV winning 35-30 against the South Coast visitors thanks to a late score from Will Birch. Sadly for Rugby Lane supporters this was not a propitious omen for the 1st XV. Brighton confirmed their status as league leaders with a 43-33 victory in a match that was not only highly entertaining but also competitive.

Brighton had not lost since the opening day of the campaign, a narrow home defeat to Beckenham. Since that day they had won nine on the spin and sat proudly atop the league. In contrast, the Black & Whites had lost their last three. Home supporters were hoping that once again Rugby Lane would be a graveyard for the top team in Regional 2 South East as it had proved last season for the Kent triumvirate of Sidcup, Medway and Beckenham. On an overcast December afternoon Freddy Bunting kicked off towards the clubhouse. The visitors monopolised the opening ten minutes with a splendid 50/22 from fly-half Maxx Morris providing the first opportunity of the game. Excellent Sutton & Epsom defence culminated in a turnover and S&E cleared their lines.

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Against the run of play Sutton & Epsom scored the first try of the afternoon. Gareth O'Brien did well to cut back inside to find support and the hosts advanced centrally. The forwards carried before releasing the backs. A perfectly timed and angled run by captain Bunting to an inside pass saw him surge 30 metres untouched to score under the posts. The captain added the extras for a 7-0 lead. Within five minutes the crowd were roaring on winger Finlay Scott, who was just forced into touch by the cover. Filled with confidence S&E went in search of their second score. The supporters did not have long to wait. Playing their best rugby of the game, the Surrey men were awarded a couple of penalties 5 metres from the line. Mr Ollie Carter issued a warning to curb the indiscretions of Brighton. From the second opportunity under the sticks the forwards finally forced their way over, with flanker Josh Rae scoring. Bunting doubled the advantage with the simple conversion for a 14-0 lead.

Within five minutes the table-toppers were on the board. Having kicked a penalty to the corner, the catch and drive ushered hooker Tom Youngs over the line. The conversion was not met by unanimous approval and was declared to have passed over the top of the upright and so a miss. This initiated a period of Brighton dominance. Dogged defence offered Sutton & Epsom relief with a penalty. The failure to find touch received the ultimate punishment. Maxx Morris countered from halfway, glided around the cover and popped the ball inside for Number 8 Fergus Matla to run in unopposed. Centre Marcus Condon added the extras as Brighton trailed 12-14. Moments later they were celebrating the lead. Fullback Ross Miller made the telling break and winger Tyrone Makasi was sprinting to the corner. Fullback Gareth O'Brien desperately corner-flagging forced his man into touch. Mr Carter ruled the challenge illegal and correctly awarded a penalty try and a yellow card. Brighton now led 19-14.

Having conceded three tries without reply, and being reduced to 14 men, the half-time whistle could not come quickly enough for Sutton & Epsom. S&E rallied and ended the first period on the front foot. As the teams turned around it seemed the remaining minutes on the yellow might be crucial. Damage limitation for Sutton & Epsom or the pressing home of numerical superiority by Brighton seemed the likely scenarios. The hosts had demonstrated in the first half that at their best they might still prevail. It appeared it would take the Black & Whites' best to down Brighton's colours.

Against the odds Sutton & Epsom opened the second-half scoring within five minutes. A couple of kicks from scrum half Munford behind the defence led to a penalty. The ensuing 5-metre lineout created the try for the irrepressible hooker Sam Lennie. Despite being a man down S&E were level at 19-19. But Sutton & Epsom were soon deep in defence following a brace of penalties and the Morris boot. A 5-metre lineout created quick ball, a powerful carry by flanker Kas Lee set up the try for his captain, fellow flanker Will Hoare. Condon bisected the uprights for 26-19. Then a break by Morris set up Makasi but excellent defence denied the winger. It was temporary relief. Again, the Morris boot advanced his charges. A lineout was secured in the 22, the forwards took charge and Matla had his second try. Condon extended the lead to 14 points with Brighton 33-19 ahead.

The game, yet to enter the final quarter, was at a critical phase. Would Brighton disappear over the horizon or could Sutton & Epsom claw back into contention? The Black & Whites rallied. Perhaps a quick tap penalty 30 metres out was the wrong option; a kick to the corner or an easy 3-pointer might have been wiser. Fortunately, shortly after the scrum won S&E a penalty and they reprised their lineout success. A touch of "same same but different" as this time Jack Howes was the beneficiary, scoring off the bench for the second week running. The conversion made it 33-26.

Brighton responded swiftly with a penalty, taking the easy three for 36-26. The Rugby Lane reply was instant. Adam Bibby collected the restart and Sutton & Epsom surged down the touchline. The ball was spun open and Sam Lennie, like a rhinoceros on the charge, ran over the not inconsiderable presence of Kas Lee. Gareth O'Brien, now at 9, picked up from the ruck and burst to the line, sidestepping the last man. Bunting added the extras and Brighton had a slender 36-33 lead. The men from Waterhall stayed calm. Matla's powerful 30-metre carry put the visitors in the Sutton & Epsom half. Then a penalty conceded at the scrum was punished. In the blink of an eye the Blues were advancing to the posts and Kas Lee joined the Brighton back-row try club. Condon's conversion made it 43-33. A late Morris break resulted in Kyren Ghumra receiving a yellow card for failing to intercept. Minutes later Mr Carter concluded proceedings with Brighton 43-33 to the good.

This might have been the fourth loss on the bounce but it was a far better performance from Sutton & Epsom. They fought back after trailing by 14 points and at 33-36 it was anyone's game. They scored five excellent tries, dividing the spoils 3-2 in favour of the tireless forwards. Now that S&E have faced every side in the league, Brighton look excellent value as league leaders. Kieran Finney, starting at lock, had his best game of the season, Gareth O'Brien coped admirably as stand-in 9 in the final quarter and the effort could not be faulted. It was a game with guts and tenacity to the fore, sprinkled with a couple of stunning Sutton & Epsom scores.

Brighton were well worth their bonus-point win. Consistency in selection reaps rewards as five of their forwards have played every match. The powerful back-row trio of Captain Hoare, Lee and Matla contributed four of their six tries and impressed throughout. Another ever-present was fly-half Maxx Morris. The affectation of the extra 'x', on this showing, looked to stand for extra special, thankfully sparing a third that might imply a career in adult entertainment. The fly-half had an outstanding game, kicking with precision, making numerous breaks and running the game. Back in 2015-16, when he was breaking into the 1st XV, he impressed at Rugby Lane in a 22-3 loss to Sutton & Epsom's title-winning team playing opposite Paul Hodgson, and it is wonderful to see a player of great promise develop into such a talent and stay at his boyhood club.

Next Saturday Sutton & Epsom travel to Dartfordians, who they beat 33-29 at Rugby Lane back in September. The Black & Whites will be looking to start the return leg of the season with a win. Kick off 2pm at Horn Park. Meanwhile, Brighton host Battersea Ironsides with their lead extending to eight points following Sidcup's 29-31 home loss to Bromley.

Sutton & Epsom:
O'Brien, Scott, Bibby, Bunting ©, Ghumra, Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Lennie, Boaden, McTaggart, Finney, Rea, Tame & Hegarty. Reps: Howes, Duey & Bennion.

Brighton:

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Miller, Challis, Condon, Pratt, Makasi, Morris, Taylor, Peake, Young, Rowlandson, Simpson, Egerton, Hoare ©, Lee & Matla. Reps: Travis, Ashby & O'Hagan.

John Croysdill

Photo credit: Robin Kennedy

A Canterbury tale of woe for Epsom's Rugby team

22 December 2025

Canterbury II 30 Sutton & Epsom RFC 26. Saturday 29th November.

The Pilgrims had belatedly progressed to Level 6 when their glass ceiling was removed by the RFU. After an inauspicious start to their campaign they had shown improved form whilst, in contrast, the emphatic Sutton start to the season has somewhat stuttered. The outcome of the fixture was never going to be a foregone conclusion that a casual glance at the league table might have implied. By the final whistle the Black & Whites had suffered their third loss on the spin whilst the hosts had returned to winning ways, overturning a 21-point deficit to triumph 30-26.

An accident on the M25 threatened to hamper the visitors' preparations but they negotiated the scenic rural route to arrive at a rain-lashed Merton Lane. Fortunately the weather relented by the time the game kicked off under the floodlights. Canterbury welcomed back Harry Sloan, Alfie Orris and Jesse De Vries after lengthy absences, while for Sutton the vastly experienced Steve Munford replaced the injured Laurence Wise at 9 and Tom Boaden moved from the bench to start in the front row. The Kent club kicked off with an effort lacking in altitude that set the tone for a laboured start. If anything, the hosts looked like the team who had endured the more tortuous journey, though traffic in Canterbury at this time of year is far from ideal. It was a red-letter day for Sutton's wing Kyren Ghumra who was playing his 150th league match. The winger celebrated in perfect style with a try in the third minute. Tom Lennard made the significant break and Ghumra ran a scything line to score under the posts. Freddy Bunting added the extras for a 7-0 lead.

Before ten minutes had been played the Black & Whites had doubled their lead and Ghumra's dream day continued with his second try. The forwards provided clean quick ball and Adam Bibby appreciated the overlap, sending the speedster on his way. Bunting bisected the uprights for 14-0. On the quarter hour Sutton turned over the ball in the 22 and advanced through the pack towards the line. After calmness and control came calamity as they fumbled close to glory. After a first quarter monopolised by an S&E side exploiting the sloping terrain, Canterbury awoke from their slumber and journeyed into the visitors' 22 seeking a response. On the half hour Steve Munford's long clearance had the hosts retreating once more to their 22. Things worsened for the home side when hooker Jake Dengate received a yellow card. Sutton immediately exploited the numerical advantage, executing a set play from their lineout and allowing the prolific hooker Sam Lennie to collect try number 13 in his ninth outing of the campaign. Bunting added his third conversion for a 21-point advantage.

For the visiting supporters it was a delightful reminder of early-season pomp but a knowledgeable local sage informed the Sutton scribe that even a four-try cushion was unsafe with this slope. The first period entered its last few minutes and Canterbury finally got on the scoreboard. A simple penalty from Owain Collins made it 3-21, visibly injecting hope and confidence into the Pilgrims. The turning point came on the stroke of half time. A powerful catch and drive put the Black & Whites on their heels and replacement Nathan Morris forced his way over. The conversion erred and the referee concluded the half. Canterbury sought the sanctuary of the dressing room whilst Sutton stayed on the pitch to hear the second-half tactics. The hosts trailed 8-21, hoping the 13-point deficit would not prove insurmountable.

The second period began with great home purpose and an early penalty that, fortunately for Sutton, struck the upright. For the next Canterbury attack Sutton were indebted to Gareth O'Brien whose try-saving tackle and perfect jackal were of the highest defensive order. Five minutes later the hosts were not to be denied as Owain Collins, the talented young ten, surged to within five metres and then brushed aside a mountainous defender to score. He added the conversion for 15-21.

A minute later the Canterbury comeback was complete as fullback Owen Hewett ran in from distance despite a desperate tackle attempt, his momentum carrying him over under the posts. Collins converted for a narrow home lead with 25 minutes remaining, and soon extended it with a penalty after a strike against the head, making it 25 unanswered points. Sutton's early purple patch had faded and it was now one-way traffic for the Kent club whose forwards, led by Divine, dominated collisions and forced penalties. The slope, gentle at the start of the half, now felt extreme.

Sutton's inspiration came from Adam Bibby who chased a kick and made a thunderous tackle, forcing a penalty. Another infringement followed, placing Sutton deep in the Canterbury 22. The forwards controlled the drive and replacement Jack Howes touched down out wide. The missed conversion left Sutton ahead 26-25 with a bonus point secured. Canterbury had ten minutes to respond. Initially they fluffed their lines with an overthrown 5-metre lineout and then conceded a penalty. But third time proved lucky. A catch and drive moved them into the 22 before the backs swept into action. Collins improvised with a basketball chest pass that opened the field and Hewett raced clear to score in the corner. The

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conversion failed but the hosts led again, 30-26.

Could Sutton launch one last assault? Tension rose as infringements disrupted play. Canterbury, suddenly unable to control the ball, struggled to run down the clock, but their rapid, abrasive defence contained the visitors to halfway. The game concluded when Bunting's penalty to touch failed to reach the 22 and Canterbury kicked the ball out to seal a 30-26 victory.

After a glorious start it had looked an ideal occasion for Kyren Ghumra to celebrate his 150th league appearance. But in recent rounds Sutton have been unable to maintain their early intensity long enough to subdue opponents. Canterbury rose from their early slumber, combining a robust forward effort with pace in the backs. The longer the game went on the better Collins played. The hosts never panicked despite trailing by three goals and dominated the second half. For the Black & Whites Rob Hegarty and Ben Tame refused to take a backward step but the forwards could not replicate the fluency of the early exchanges. There was, for the second Saturday in a row, the consolation of two bonus points.

Perhaps the Pilgrims' progress was predictable. They struggled through the Slough of Despond, stood atop the Hill of Destiny before entering the Valley of the Shadow of Death, overcame the Giant Despair and were welcomed to the Celestial City of victory. Though Sutton & Epsom supporters were disappointed they could not fault the hospitality of the hosts whose welcoming bar and ideally placed viewing area provided perfect shelter from the elements. There was neither hobgoblin nor foul fiend in sight.

Next Saturday 6th December Sutton & Epsom host league leaders Brighton. The Sussex men have had an exceptional start as they bid to return to Level Five. They have one loss at home to Beckenham and a 100% record on their travels. Despite three losses on the trot Sutton & Epsom remain third in the table. Rugby Lane supporters will hope the visit of the early pacesetters inspires a return to early-season form. Kick-off is at 2pm and all are welcome.

Sutton & Epsom
O'Brien, Fitzgerald, Bibby, Bunting (c), Ghumra, Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Lennie, Boaden, McTaggart, Duey, Rea, Tame, Hegarty. Reps: Howes, Finney, Scott.

Canterbury II
Hewett, Masaka, Fielder, Sloan, Orris, Collins, Valladares, Oliver, Dengate, MacMillan, De Vries, Hunt (c), Divine, Evans. Reps: Bull, Morris, Parker.

John Croysdill

Horsham hound Epsom's huddle

22 December 2025



Sutton & Epsom were beaten 36–29 by Horsham Saturday 22nd November in a hard-fought and entertaining afternoon at Rugby Lane. The fixture brought together two clubs whose paths diverged at the end of the 2022–23 season, when Horsham were promoted and spent two seasons visiting such places as Bracknell and Bournemouth, while Sutton went into Regional 2 South East for rebuilding. This was their first league meeting, and Horsham's mid-table position did not reflect their quality. Two draws and a narrow defeat to Sidcup suggested they might easily have been in the top three. The match lived up to expectations, with the sides sharing ten tries but the visitors finishing on top.

Despite forecasts of bleak conditions, rain proved only intermittent and the wind more nuisance than defining feature. Early exchanges showed how hard yards would be to earn, with both sides tackling fiercely in a high-tempo contest. The first score came after twelve minutes when Horsham failed to gather a ball on halfway. Tom Lennard broke towards the flank and linked with Archie Fitzgerald, who released captain Freddy Bunting to score from 30 metres. The conversion was narrowly missed but Sutton led 5–0.

By the end of the first quarter Horsham had turned the match. Scrum-half Aaron Linfield's footwork took play into the Sutton half, and after several phases prop Luke Standing showed impressive pace to level the scores. Minutes later a Laurence Wise clearance was charged down and centre Tom Whittaker forced his way over. Joe Blake converted both for a 14–5 lead.

Sutton's positive phases were repeatedly undermined by turnovers, lineout steals and determined Horsham defence. A rare scrum penalty for the hosts inside the 22 provided momentum and hooker Sam Lennie powered over from close range. The conversion drifted wide, leaving Sutton 10–14 behind.

A deep restart forced Sutton back and Horsham soon attacked again. A probing kick earned them a 5-metre lineout and a fumbled catch gave the visitors a scrum in prime position. Persistent defence was finally broken when prop Jack Osgood crashed over, with Blake converting for 21–10. Sutton pressed in the final minutes of the half but were repeatedly repelled. Referee Marc Fusil brought the half to a close with Horsham still 21–10 ahead.

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Early in the second half Sutton's task became harder. After five minutes Kyren Ghumra received a yellow card for a deliberate knock-on, reducing the home side to fourteen men. Horsham capitalised immediately, kicking to the corner and completing a bonus-point try through replacement prop Josh Earle. It gave all three Horsham front-row players a try, though Blake missed his only kick of the day as the lead extended to 26–10.

Sutton rallied despite their disadvantage. A scrum penalty and catch-and-drive produced Lennie's second try, though the kick was missed. At 15–26, hopes of a comeback rose — only for those hopes to be dashed when Lennard's clearance was charged down by Blake, who gathered to score and convert for 33–15.

Restored to full strength, Sutton chased points and quickly secured their own bonus point. A charge-down established field position and Lennie completed his hat-trick with a direct finish from ten metres, celebrating in Jason Robinson fashion. Bunting added the conversion for 22–33 with fifteen minutes left. Horsham responded with a calmly taken penalty for 36–22, leaving Sutton needing three scores for victory.

Sutton struck again in the closing stages with a powerful catch-and-drive that released the backs, allowing Ghumra to score in the corner. Bunting converted impressively and the margin narrowed to 29–36 as the match entered added time. A second bonus point was within reach and an equaliser not impossible, but Horsham closed out the remaining minutes to hand Sutton their first home defeat of the season.

Horsham were worthy winners, their disciplined defence denying Sutton's backline and proving particularly resilient inside their own 22. Scrum-half Linfield was outstanding, dictating tempo with sharp distribution, jinking runs and intelligent kicking. Lock Jacob Denhart disrupted Sutton's lineout, and Blake orchestrated play with a varied running and kicking game. Athletic and well organised, Horsham look set for a high finish.

For Sutton, Lennie's hat-trick places him alongside Ghumra and Hegarty as players who have scored league trebles this season yet still finished on the losing side. The scrum was again a major strength, often pushing Horsham backwards. The loss of scrum-half Wise to a dislocated shoulder in the first half was a significant setback. Sutton showed character after the yellow card, but the sense persisted that they were chasing the match, and they may later reflect on missed opportunities inside the Horsham 22.

Next Saturday, 29 November, Sutton & Epsom face Canterbury II, "The Pilgrims", whose recent run of three wins was halted by a 33–0 defeat to Sidcup. Both teams will be keen to return to winning ways at Merton Lane.

Sutton & Epsom: O'Brien, Fitzgerald, Bibby, Bunting (c), Ghumra, Lennard, Wise, Johnson, Lennie, Mount, McTaggart, Duey, Rea, Tame, Hegarty. Replacements: Boaden, Finney, Munford.
Horsham: Warwick, Sanders, Whittaker, Johnson, Nwachukwu, Blake, Linfield, Standing, Kilfeather, Osgood, Denhart, Howard, Thompson, Paku, Smith. Replacements: Earle, Murphy, Grogan.

John Croysdill

Photo credit – Robin Kennedy

Batteresea stun Sutton & Epsom rugby

22 December 2025



Battersea Ironsides 24 Sutton & Epsom 22. Saturday 8th November.

This fixture has produced last-minute drama since the sides first met in league action two seasons ago. It is certainly not a contest to leave with ten minutes to go in the hope of a swifter journey home or to purchase a pint before the rush. Once again it lived up to its reputation as Battersea Ironsides overhauled a 15-point deficit to secure the win with a long-range penalty with barely a minute left on the clock. The hosts have twice been on the wrong end of denouement drama and on Saturday it was a case of third time lucky as they won 24-22.

Captain Bunting returned to the helm of the good ship Sutton to relieve First Mate McTaggart, who had navigated the parlous seas several leagues under the Premiership with five wins from five, to return below decks to the engine room of the pack. S&E were minus two stalwarts with Messrs Bibby and Jones nursing injuries. The latter had played the last 34 consecutive league matches, a rarity these days.

As for the hosts, they were an unrecognisable team from the corresponding fixture last season. No longer guided by the regal splendour of Charles Stuart at 10, there were only three survivors from the thrilling 19-19 draw. For that matter the Black & Whites only had eight from that match – *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

Cameron Baker initiated proceedings on Garratt Green, a surface with deceptive declivities, on a day blessed with glorious sunshine and thankfully with no hint of rain at a venue offering no shelter for the loyal patrons. The first quarter implied that it might be one of those unfortunate afternoons for the Black & Whites. It included balls dropped by usually

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safe hands, promising openings that came to nought and penalties conceded for unwarranted verbosity with Mr Harry Hopkins that questioned his interpretation of the laws rather than any family connection to FDR's New Deal stalwart.

After ten minutes the hosts took the lead, capitalising on a penalty to establish themselves in the 22, and following admirable control Matt Bell was on hand to cross the whitewash for his first try of the afternoon. Cameron Baker started his perfect kicking afternoon with an impressive conversion from the flank to give the Ironsides a 7-0 lead.

There was a significant area of consolation for the visitors as their forwards were enjoying one of their most impressive scrummaging performances for many a long day. The efficiency of the lineout was not far behind the set scrum in impressing the travelling support. However, it continued to be a frustrating afternoon in terms of points on the board for S&E.

Clinical efficiency in the 22 was sadly lacking but just as the crowd were anticipating the teams turning around with Sutton trailing, the game was transformed. The Rugby Lane men produced their try of the season. Wonderful surges from locks Duey and McTaggart were aided by sumptuous offloads. Prop Dan Johnson maintained continuity to release Josh Rea who sidestepped past the cover and strode home. Bunting levelled the scores with his conversion for 7-7.

Battersea Ironsides, robust and organised in attack and defence, had frustrated Sutton at the breakdown. The hosts were coping admirably with a scrummage that was regularly in reverse and much credit must go to Raphael Arboine who not only gathered the challenging ball back-pedalling but also frequently made yards with his powerful running. S&E, liberated by their opening score, pressed on for further first-half glory.

As the first period entered time added on they went into the lead. The Ironsides conceded a penalty on their 22 which Bunting drilled into the corner. McTaggart soared skywards to secure the lineout possession and the formidable Sam Lennie scored after an impressive catch and drive. The conversion drifted wide but the Black & Whites led 12-7.

There was still five minutes of additional time with a revitalised Sutton eager to add to their account. With the last action of the half the visitors were given an opportunity to extend their advantage. Sutton & Epsom were awarded a penalty a couple of paces within the Battersea half but very central. Freddy Bunting opted to go for goal but his effort fell short and the sides went into the interval with Sutton leading 12-7.

Sutton started the second half brightly, though the flow of the game was interrupted by numerous penalties. After ten minutes they had a most promising position deep in the 22. Once again the lineout was followed by a dominant drive that Battersea bested with determined defence. The ball was transferred from the pack to the backs and Tom Lennard kicked with precision to winger Kyren Ghumra who scored in the corner. For those with a statistical disposition it was a red-letter moment as the winger now had 74 tries in 148 appearances. The challenging kick failed to add to the 17-7 lead.

If Sutton thought it would be one-way traffic for the remainder of the contest they had a stark reminder that Battersea Ironsides were a very dangerous outfit. A sweeping attack appeared to have created a wonderful try. A man, who shall remain nameless, not only finished with power and pace but also intelligently arced around endeavouring to make the conversion simpler. Unfortunately, Garratt Green is not the Parc de Princes and the in-goal area is miserly rather than magnificent, and he went beyond the parameters of play. There was to be no addition to the score.

Five minutes later the visitors were imposing themselves once more on the game. A driving maul in excess of 20 metres from halfway did not bring immediate results but it placed S&E in the right area. Sutton went through their phases and the ball arrived in the hands of Sam Lennie. The Kiwi hooker is a force of nature and with 20 yards to go and multiple defenders he found a most direct route to the line for his second try of the afternoon. Despite the encouraging roars from the Rugby Lane supporters the Bunting conversion high over the pigmy posts was adjudged to have not done the necessary. Sutton & Epsom led 22-7, having secured a bonus point, and were 15 points up with 15 minutes of normal time remaining.

As the game began to meander towards the inevitable, the Ironsides initiated a remarkable recovery in a magnificent seven minutes. Hope and inspiration was provided by winger Will Ford whose fine finish to a sweeping move was improved by a clinical conversion from the extremities by Cameron Baker. The fly-half ran back towards his team declaring the deficit was only eight points as S&E led 22-14.

A couple of minutes later the reinvigorated hosts were celebrating another try. A defensive lapse on halfway was punished as Battersea flooded into the Sutton half. Scrambling defence halted the advance in the 22 but the ball was quickly released for Matt Bell to secure his second score of the afternoon. The reliable Baker boot meant the hosts trailed 21-22 with three minutes to go.

The inevitable occurred as the sands of time were drifting away. Battersea were awarded a penalty. Though it was only just in the Sutton half, Cameron Baker, without hesitation, opted for the posts. His powerful kick was perfectly straight and Battersea Ironsides led 24-22. There was just time for the re-start that failed to travel the allotted distance, and the subsequent scrum to the hosts. Despite going back at a rate of knots and the harrying of Steve Munford, the ball was kicked dead to spark Battersea celebrations of an epic 24-22 win.

Many salutary lessons will hopefully be learned by Sutton but great credit must be given to the spirit of Battersea embodied by Raphael Arboine's performance and the nerveless kicking of Cameron Baker. For Sutton the scrummaging was superb, Sam Lennie was, as usual, immense, and Josh Rea had his best performance to date for the Black & Whites.

Next Saturday is free from league action and Sutton will endeavour to return to winning ways at Rugby Lane on Saturday 22nd November when they host Horsham for the first time in a league encounter.

Sutton & Epsom:
O'Brien, Benson, Scott, Bunting (c), Ghumra, Lennard, Wise, Johnson, Lennie, Mount, McTaggart, Duey, Rea, Tame & Hegarty.
Reps: Boaden, Finney & Munford.

Battersea Ironsides:

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Diamond, Ford, Campbell, Bell, McGwire, Baker, Thomas, Chetwynd, Jones, Gomm, Bishop, Wharton, Pender, McCleary & Arboine.
Reps: Chetwynd-Talbot, Singh & Bourke.

John Croysdill

Image: Action of the two sides from an previous fixture. Credit: Robin Kennedy

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Battling Beckenham Take Sutton & Epsom RFC The Full Distance

22 December 2025



Sutton & Epsom 22 Beckenham 19. Saturday 25th October.

This fixture is rapidly gaining a reputation for fabulous finishes. Two seasons ago the visitors triumphed 42-41 on a sweltering afternoon as they watched Freddy Bunting's last-moment touchline penalty from halfway miss by millimetres. Last time the hosts prevailed 20-19 when Lewis Bunton's last-ditch drop kick failed in direction and altitude. On Saturday in excess of 250 avaricious spectators gathered expecting more drama and they were not disappointed as **Tom Lennard's** last kick of the game earned Sutton a 22-19 triumph.

An ominous slate-grey sky punctuated by a resplendent rainbow hung over the clubhouse environs. Fortuitously, the match avoided the predicted precipitation but the wind was a constant hindrance to the place-kickers. Sutton welcomed back most of their society absentees. In contrast Beckenham arrived in reduced circumstances, not only minus their second-row pairing but also their centre combination from Round 6. The Kent club kicked off and the first opportunity was engineered by S&E. A well-angled kick by **Tom Lennard** was improved by **Kyren Ghumra's** chase and charge down. **Sam Lennie** dragged the scrambling defender into touch and the Black & Whites had a five-metre attacking lineout within five minutes of play. All seemed set for an imperious catch-and-drive try but a shrill blast from the whistle indicated an infraction enabling Beckenham to have the first scrum of the afternoon. A penalty ensued and the visitors cleared their lines.

After ten minutes Beckenham enjoyed a period of total domination. The Sutton & Epsom defence was exceptional against robust carrying, grubber kicks and jinking backs. Unfortunately for the Black & Whites it ended like the Alamo rather than Mafeking. The ten-minute onslaught concluded with **George Bunton** squeezing into the corner. The fraternal failure to add the extras by **Lewis Bunton** did not diminish Beckenham's deserved 5-0 lead nearing the end of the first quarter. Moments later, misfortune struck the visitors as centre **Matt Lovell** was forced off through injury, stretching their resources even further in that position as winger **Fran Pennacchia** stepped up to the challenge.

Sutton had a golden opportunity to open their account with another five-metre line. It was overthrown and Beckenham countered through their excellent flanker **Kareem Swandells** as he motored towards halfway. A couple of passes later **George Bunton** was in possession, he chipped ahead, re-gathered the ball and sauntered in under the posts. It was a sensational score as the recent returnee from the Northeast added his second try. A Beckenham baritone boomed: "Sutton supporters, where were you when the best try was scored on your ground?" **Lewis Bunton** put the cherry on the Bunton family celebratory cake with the simple kick for an impressive 12-0 lead.

The Balmoral Avenue boys pressed on and **Gareth O'Brien** was forced to touch down and then centre **Greg Lawlor** came close to scoring on the half hour. Finally, Sutton enjoyed some possession and engineered another five-metre chance. Despite advancing towards glory, prop **Alex Mount** was held up over the line. The first period was entering its final moments of regulation time. Yet another five-metre attempt came up short but the hosts had the consolation of a penalty. The forwards took control and, *mirabile dictu*, **Alex Mount** scored. **Tom Lennard** added the conversion for 7-12. The first half had endured multiple interruptions and belatedly concluded after almost fifty minutes of breathless entertainment with Beckenham leading 12-7.

Beckenham were good value for their interval advantage. They had monopolised territory and possession with back-row forwards **Kareem Swandells**, **Tom Ward** and captain **Andrew Knowles** in superb form and winger **Kyrone Bennett** a constant threat. Their swarming defence had denied Sutton time and space, neutering the threat of the home backs. S&E had been remarkably resilient in defence and had fashioned multiple opportunities from attacking lineouts. The final outcome was still very much in the balance and another nail-biting finale looked probable.

The start of the second half made onlookers recall Laurel & Hardy, the Keystone Cops and Fred Karno's Army. **Rob Hegarty** was fortunately placed to purloin the ball on halfway. He walked back to connect with support but it was

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dislodged and kicked ahead. Sutton were in full retreat as Beckenham sprinted with optimism to the corner. The ball rolled free behind the S&E line and **Kyren Ghumra** decided to counter. He narrowly evaded a couple of tackles in his lateral run before seeking the far touch. His kick hit the upright and went straight to the opposition. The visitors added to the pandemonium by dropping the ball with the line at their mercy. Encouraged by that mayhem, moments later, number 8 **Andrew Knowles** kicked ahead once more and nearly manufactured a try.

Sutton were desperate for a modicum of control and a period of sustained pressure. After some encouraging phases fifteen minutes into the half they were awarded a kickable penalty. Despite trailing by only five points they opted for yet another attacking lineout. The mountainous **McTaggart** rose to claim the ball. The forwards rolled ever onwards towards the uprights. The ever-alert scrum-half **Laurence Wise** took the ball, dummied and reached for the line for a try. **Tom Lennard's** kick failed but Sutton were level at 12-12.

Tom Boaden came on to replace try-scorer **Alex Mount** in the front row with the final quarter approaching. Beckenham responded positively to the setback and twice were frustrated by errant handling deep in the Sutton 22 as they put the hosts under the cosh. The exemplary Black & White defence spread across the park, tackled tenaciously and refused to take a step backwards. Having weathered the storm it was the Surrey side that secured the lead with their next visit to the Kent half. Another penalty was kicked to the 22. After the frustrations of earlier lineouts what followed was a catch and drive of pure perfection and the forwards marched over the line from 15 metres with hooker **Sam Lennie** scoring. The **Tom Lennard** conversion followed such a bizarre path that the ball might have been remotely controlled as it meandered over the posts for a 19-12 lead.

With ten minutes remaining referee **Ruben Gobregts** issued a yellow card to reduce Beckenham to 14 men. Boosted by their numerical superiority Sutton looked to be in control and a bonus-point try looked more likely than an equalising score from Beckenham. However, captain **Andrew Knowles** had other ideas as he stole the ball near halfway. His kick ahead was weighted to perfection to force a drop out. The visitors now flung themselves into attack. Penalties followed and **Gareth O'Brien** was shown a yellow to make it 14 v 14. From close range **Rimarni Richards** powered over the line, as is his wont at Rugby Lane, having scored last season to add to the brace he scored two years ago. The conversion made it 19-19 with the crowd expecting yet more drama.

For the third season on the trot it came down to the last kick of the game. This time it was the boot of **Tom Lennard**. Having removed his headgear, he steadied himself and sent the ball through the uprights to secure a 22-19 victory. It was a pulsating affair that could have gone either way and arguably a draw would have been the fairest outcome. Beckenham, with their back row in their vanguard, had been superb. Equally, Sutton's superb number 8 **Rob Hegarty** carried courageously in adversity in a victory built on defensive durability and self-belief.

Both teams will be glad that next Saturday is a rest weekend before league hostilities resume on Saturday 8 November when Sutton visit Battersea Ironsides at their famous facility with canine connotations.

Sutton & Epsom: O'Brien, Benson, Rea, Bibby, Ghumra, Lennard, Wise, Johnson, Lennie, Mount, McTaggart (c), Duey, Tame, Jones & Hegarty.
Replacements: Boaden, Butt & Elliott.

Beckenham: Bunton G., Pennacchia, Lovell, Lawlor, Bennett, Bunton L., Gurney, Baker, Aoke-Tiamu, Richards, Moran, Tookey, Swandells, Ward & Knowles (c).
Replacements: Brown, Willden & Charles.

John Croysdill

Image from a previous fixture. – credit Robin Kennedy

Epsom's Rugby Team Make Light Of Missing Men To Go Top

22 December 2025

Gravesend 12 Sutton and Epsom RFC 29. Saturday 18th October.

Sutton and Epsom arrived at the Rectory Field seeking a return to winning ways following their first loss of the campaign at Sidcup. Gravesend, the masters of the close encounter last season, have retained their penchant for fine margins, opening their account with a draw and losing last week by a solitary point to Brighton. In a keenly contested match it was Sutton and Epsom who returned to Rugby Lane with the spoils as their 29-12 bonus point win took them to the top of the Regional 2 South East table.

Absenteeism, unacceptable to previous generations, has become the norm at this level of club rugby and the level-headed must take the approach of the famous phrase involving a couple of playground amusements. However, coaches still curse the slings and arrows of outrageous planning. It was Sutton's turn to suffer as six players from the Sidcup squad were absent without leave. This offered a chance for players to press their claim for 1st XV status and tested squad depth.

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Gravesend had their own issues as they were without their talented trio of George Bruce, Ben Kite and Ned Warren who were on their injured list.

Gareth O'Brien kicked off for the visitors in benign conditions on a mild afternoon. The initial sparring saw both sides employ robust runners that were met by thunderous tackling. Defence monopolised attack in the opening exchanges as the sides looked for openings to exploit. After ten minutes Sutton were awarded a penalty 40 metres out and sent it towards the corner. Having secured the ball they demonstrated admirable control through the phases but the forwards were thwarted by staunch Gravesend defence until it was released wide and Finlay Scott waltzed in unopposed. Gareth O'Brien, taking over the kicking duties, impressively converted for 7-0.

S and E were soon on the attack as Adam Bibby's probing kick forced Gravesend to touch down and restart under their posts. Moments later a tremendous take of a clearance kick by Sutton was followed by an attempted 50/22 that rolled agonisingly into touch in goal. Consolation was swift and bounteous. Gravesend dropped the ball near halfway and Adam Bibby fly-hacked forward. The Kiwi centre burst forward, wisely declined the opportunity to try to scoop up the ball and kicked ahead again and won the race to the line to score. The conversion drifted wide but Sutton had a 12-0 lead at the end of the first quarter.

Gravesend needed a swift riposte and within five minutes they were on the scoreboard. Enjoying a spell of possession they threw themselves on the Black and Whites' defence and were met with magnificent tackling, with one Gareth O'Brien tackle synonymous of the team effort. The visitors were undone by an infringement and it was the host's turn to kick it into the corner. The initial thrust was repelled but another penalty gave the Rectory Field team a second chance that they gratefully accepted as lock Josh Mackenzie forced his way over. Rhys Betts' conversion failed but Gravesend were back within a score at 5-12.

With the interval approaching it was a case of hope springs eternal for the home team. Centre Ben Hope chose the perfect attacking line to make the initial break on halfway, then accelerating and evading the cover he left flailing tacklers in his wake for a stunning solo score. Rhys Betts nonchalantly added the extras and Gravesend were level at 12-12. For those who thought that the first period would end honours even and decided to avoid the half-time rush at the bar they would have missed Sutton's retort. The men from Surrey, as if affronted by the Kent club's recovery, put together their best attacking sequence. The ball went to winger Finlay Scott who did superbly in limited space to take the ball to the 22. The Sutton pack took over and went through multiple phases to camp under the posts and hooker Sam Lennie applied the coup de grâce. Gareth O'Brien chipped over the simple conversion to restore Sutton's lead. Referee Joe Garman's whistle blew to end the first half with the score at Gravesend 12 Sutton and Epsom 19.

The first period had been an even affair with Sutton having more of the territory and possession but both sides had shown both in attack and defence that the result was far from obvious. Added to the equation was S and E's bizarre statistic for this season that they had yet to win a second half in their previous five outings. Gravesend kicked off the second half and seized the initiative with a marvellous catch from Ben Hope who surged to the Sutton 22. The cautious optimism of the travelling Sutton support was immediately transformed to "here we go again". It was a case of "ye of little faith" as the visitors dealt admirably with the situation. Moments later the home support was on its feet as winger Andrew Cooke exploded down the flank threatening to score but at the crucial moment as the cover arrived he lost control of the ball and Sutton survived. From the scrum Sutton and Epsom were indebted to Number 8 Rob Hegarty who picked up from the base and carried them out of their 22 to relative safety.

Having weathered the storm, Dan Jones' alertness to a loose ball initiated the visitors' first attack of the second half as he passed to Gareth O'Brien who pegged Gravesend back in their 22. It was the start of a period of Sutton ascendancy and control. However, this did not result in any addition to the scoreboard. A promising attack was undermined by conceding a penalty on the deck 10 metres out. Then what looked like an inevitable score concluded with not only a penalty coughed up inches from glory but also a yellow card being issued to Sam Lennie. S and E coped magnificently with the numerical inferiority and managed to add to their lead when Gareth O'Brien's penalty made it 22-12 as the match entered the final quarter. The hosts, despite the advantage of the extra man, never set foot in the Sutton half for the statutory ten minutes as even the restart went out on the full.

Restored to 15 men, S and E continued to demonstrate impressive game management. With steely focus and determination they played the game in the Gravesend half and went in search of another try that would not only provide a sizeable lead but also earn a priceless bonus point. The host's defence had impressed all afternoon and they continued to frustrate the visitors' best endeavours, with Rob Hegarty being held up over the line. With five minutes to go Gravesend lost the services of their influential Number 8 Bradley Money. It was a yellow card that creates immediate debate as he made contact with winger Archie Fitzgerald's head as the winger slipped. The decision was harsh as there was no malicious intent but it was the correct call from Mr Garman given the modern laws. Boosted by the extra man, Sutton finally secured their bonus point as Rob Hegarty forced his way over from close range. Gareth O'Brien added the tricky conversion for 29-12 and Sutton ran down the clock without any further additions to the score.

This was a very impressive win for Sutton on the road with a depleted squad. It spoke volumes to the character and team spirit that those who came in looked very comfortable and contributed to an outstanding 18-man performance. Gareth O'Brien stepped in at Number 10 and had a superb game with his kicking, running and tackling as he provided a good measure of control on proceedings. Sutton starved Gravesend of territory and possession for the vast majority of the second half. To the host's credit their excellent defence only succumbed when they were down to 14 men but they never managed to gain a foothold in the second period to enable themselves to gain points from the game.

Results around the league were most favourable to Sutton and Epsom and the win propelled them to the summit of the table. Lest we forget that next Saturday, 25 October, the Black and Whites entertain erstwhile leaders Beckenham RFC. The Balmoral Avenue club lost for the first time on Saturday and dropped to fourth in this highly competitive league.

Sutton and Epsom
Bennion, Scott, Rea, Bibby, Fitzgerald, O'Brien, Wise, Boaden, Lennie, Hilton, Duey, McTaggart (c), Tame, Jones and

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Hegarty. Reps: Howes, Butt and Lovatt.

Gravesend
Barnes, Dean, Hope, Filmer, Cooke, White, Betts, Brooker, Dadson, Shorter, Mackenzie, Falefatu, Williams, Chahal (c) and Money. Reps: Anderson, Bruce and Sims.

John Croysdill

Sidcup Burst The Sutton & Epsom Bubble

22 December 2025



Sidcup 22 Sutton & Epsom RFC 12. Saturday 11th October.

Sutton & Epsom first visited Crescent Farm in 1914 for a 25-0 win and it is a delight that, despite the ravages of league rugby, a fixture dating back over 100 years and having been played in excess of 80 times still survives and is played on the same ground. Both clubs had started the season strongly and the form book suggested a close encounter. Sutton & Epsom had garnered maximum points whilst Sidcup had enjoyed a trio of triumphs in the opening four rounds. After a bruising encounter the Kent club inflicted the first defeat of the season on their opponents from Surrey by 22-12.

This fixture was blessed with glorious sunshine throughout on a still afternoon conducive to playing rugby. Experience replaced youth at 9 for the Black & Whites as Steve Munford came in for the injured Laurence Wise. Otherwise it was salvete for Messrs Finney, Lennard and O'Brien as the revolving door of selection spun at a modest pace at Rugby Lane. Sidcup kicked off under the steely gaze of referee Jed Wolfram who had journeyed down from Harrogate. The initial exchanges set the tone for the contest as both defences threw themselves into their duties with relentless relish. Time and space were at a premium as thunderous tackles littered the field.

After ten minutes Sutton & Epsom had the first opportunity to open the scoring. It was another chapter in the rugby opus, "Take Three Points Or Kick Into The Corner", and it was no surprise to the travelling Rugby Lane support that the Bunting boot kicked for territory rather than lighting up the scoreboard. The ball was overthrown and lost. An infringement meant Take Two and the further shunning of the three in search of higher riches. The swarming Sidcup defence held firm through multiple phases before forcing an error. It was to be third time lucky on the quarter-hour. This time the catch and drive was executed to perfection as Sam Lennie powered his way over. The conversion from the flank went astray but Sutton & Epsom belatedly led 5-0.

As the first quarter concluded the Black & Whites nearly conjured a try from a quickly taken penalty near halfway. Tom Lennard made an incisive break and Gareth O'Brien was denied by cover in the corner. A relieved Sidcup dropped out from under their posts and it was their turn to test the defensive fortitude of the visitors. The Kent team camped in the Surrey 22 and besieged the line. Heroic defence on their line was punctuated by two penalties. Following the second the home team opened their account with a slick catch and drive routine that saw lock Tom Epps ushered over the line. Josh Twyford's conversion came back off the upright and the score was 5-5 approaching the half-hour mark.

Sutton & Epsom had an opportunity to regain the lead when Gareth O'Brien's kick to the 22 was enhanced by an excellent chase forcing a knock-on. Sutton & Epsom appeared to create a try as they descended on the corner only for Sidcup to intercept the vital pass and clear to halfway. With the first half approaching time added on the hosts once more set out their stall in the visitors' 22. The forwards advanced and a try appeared to be a certainty but the defence on their own line by Sutton & Epsom was mightily impressive from a 5-metre penalty. However, all the commendable work was undone by a truly idiotic penalty as a forward bellyflopped onto the ruck. Without hesitation the ball was sent to the corner. The Crescent Farm lineout, like a well-oiled machine, churned out another try for another lock, as Freddie Ruff muscled over. Josh Twyford added the extras for a 12-5 lead.

In the dying embers of the first half the home crowd enjoyed a bonus as their team benefited from their ascendancy with a penalty awarded under the posts. Common sense, rather than greed, prevailed. Josh Twyford concluded the first period with a simple three points as his side went to their dressing room very satisfied with a 15-5 lead. It had been a very even first half but Sidcup had been the more clinical of the two teams making the most of their visits to the Sutton & Epsom 22.

Freddy Bunting kicked off with Sidcup playing, as is their preference, with the slope towards the clubhouse bar in the second half. With an early penalty at the scrummage the home team were able to advance to the Sutton & Epsom 22. However, early indications of a Sutton & Epsom revival were given by an immediate boost by a break with centres Bunting and Bibby weaving their way to the enemy's half. The territorial gain was enhanced by a penalty as the Black & Whites had a lineout with 10 metres to go. An infringement let the hosts off the hook. From the clearance kick from the scrum Agu Benson ran back the ball with great effect and marvellous continuity from the forwards had Sutton & Epsom threatening until they conceded a penalty.

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The optimistic opening having been overcome, the Crescent Farm crowd were starting to enjoy their team's control of territory and possession. With the sun on their backs and the slope in their favour they went in search of a third try. The score came a dozen minutes into the half. Once more a lineout ball was controlled and the forwards advanced and Freddie Ruff scored his second. The simple conversion was added by Josh Twyford and Sidcup led 22-5.

Trailing by 17 points the triumvirate of Agu Benson, Archie Fitzgerald and Sam Lennie with their powerful carrying, time and again, tried to free Sutton & Epsom from the Sidcup shackles. It was a testimony to the quality of the home defence that they only yielded in time added on.

The game entered the last quarter with the overriding feeling that in a game with two evenly matched sides it would take something spectacular to wrestle the advantage away from Sidcup as their defence was secure and controlling affairs. The Kent side had the luxury of knowing that, apart from the carrot of a bonus point fourth try, they did not have to score tries. Calculated kicking and tireless tackling kept Sutton & Epsom at arm's length. Normal time was up as Sutton & Epsom mounted another attack in the opposition 22. They were awarded a penalty. Dan Jones, celebrating his 50th 1st XV league appearance, carried towards the right-hand corner. As is his habit, Rob Hegarty emerged from the ruck with a blistering turn of speed to score in the corner. Captain Bunting stepped up and impressively converted. Sutton & Epsom trailed 12-22 and there was the glimmer of a losing bonus point to be had.

Time ran out for the visitors who not only lost their unbeaten status but also went pointless for the first time this season. Sidcup deserved their 22-12 victory that was constructed on the solid foundations of a secure scrummage, highly effective lineout and an outstanding defence that rapidly enveloped the opposition. Hooker Harry Large, as befitting his name, had a huge game. The boiler room of the second row was rewarded for their hard work with tries. It was a fine team performance of boundless concentration, hard work and bone-shaking tackling.

For the Black & Whites the game was possibly lost in the first half when they failed to capitalise on their period of ascendancy as chances for tries slipped through their grasp. However, the never-say-die effort was epitomised by their score in time added on. Archie Fitzgerald had his best game for the club, once again Agu Benson demonstrated what a valuable addition he is to the team and their defence of their line was magnificent to behold.

Next Saturday, 18th October, the Sutton & Epsom charabanc is on the road once more with a day trip to the Rectory Field to face Gravesend RFC. The Kent club lie sixth in the table after a couple of wins and a draw from their opening five encounters.

Sutton & Epsom: O'Brien, Fitzgerald, Bibby, Bunting (c), Benson, Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Lennie, Mount, Finney, McTaggart, Rea, Jones and Hegarty. Reps: Hilton, Tame and Scott.

Sidcup: Twyford, Ellison, McMahon, Smith, Keeley L., Ubee, Ibrahim, Keeley H., Large, Carmen, Epps, Ruff, Healey, Williams and Caple. Reps: Watson, Fordham and Stokes.

John Croysdill

Image by Robin Kennedy from a 2024 Sutton & Epsom and Sidcup fixture

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Sutton & Epsom Keep The Wind In Their Sails

22 December 2025



Sutton & Epsom 40 Old Colfeians 24 Saturday 4th October. The cheeky aside that last Saturday's break from league action was to commemorate Sutton winning their opening three fixtures of the campaign is untrue but has some historical merit. It was only the fifth time, in the league era, that such a start had occurred – the last being in 2012–13. Meanwhile, their opponents Old Colfeians had sounded a klaxon call of intent with the notable scalp of Sidcup in the previous round of fixtures. A tough tussle was expected at Rugby Lane between two sides that had shared the honours in this fixture last season. The hosts maintained their perfect start in a magnificent match between two quality teams, winning 40–24.

There was a welcome return for captain Freddy Bunting, as Euan McTaggart rejoined the ranks with a proud 100% winning record as caretaker captain. He was joined by Rob Hegarty, Michael Bennion and Ben Tame, as ailments and absences ruled out Finney, Ghumra, Lennard and O'Brien. The visitors were missing the mountainous figure of their captain and powerhouse, Andy O'Malley.

Storm Amy had created testing, blustery and unfavourable conditions. Sympathy immediately went out to the full-backs and hookers as a sense of foreboding descended upon Rugby Lane with expectations of a scrappy and error-strewn contest. Perhaps the only point of interest would be whether the Bunting boot might set a personal distance record for a successful penalty kick. How wrong we were. Both sides produced a thrilling exhibition of running rugby, combining for ten tries to the delight of all assembled.

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Captain Bunting kicked off with the benefit of the gusting gale that fortunately blew across rather than down the pitch. After an impressive opening by Sutton that was thwarted by sterling defence, Bunting lofted a kick towards the wing. With perfect timing, Josh Rea arrived and, after an initial juggle, secured the ball to coast home under the posts. Bunting gratefully accepted the simple conversion for 7–0.

Five minutes later, the S&E pack exploited a perfect attacking position to advance towards the posts and Sam Lennie was unstoppable from short range. With the extras added it was 14–0 as the hosts made light of the conditions. The first quarter concluded with Sutton's third and finest score. Exploiting a generous narrow side, Archie Fitzgerald and friends interchanged passes from halfway for Laurence Wise to streak home under the posts. The conversion established an impressive 21–0 lead.

Old Colfeians, aided by a flurry of penalties, enjoyed their best passage of play and were rewarded with their opening try. Control and continuity in the hosts' 22 stretched the defence and the powerful presence of Estefan Ellis scored in the corner. The comeback was short-lived as Sutton exploited a penalty from ten metres in front of the uprights. Dan Jones ran wide, the ball was recycled, and a few carries later that man Jones was on hand to score. Bunting judged the wind to perfection for 28–5 as the Black and Whites secured the bonus point for their fourth try.

As the crowd discussed how many points the wind was worth, Sutton and Epsom pressed for more. For the final ten minutes of the half, S&E were frustrated by quality defence and an abundance of infringements. Referee Mr Edwards concluded the first moiety with the scoreboard showing Sutton & Epsom 28, visitors 5.

There had been a surprising lack of kicking and a refreshing desire to run the ball. The Sutton handling had been impressive with a minimal error count as forwards and backs combined to great effect. Old Colfeians, when given the opportunity, also looked to get the ball to their backs and showed enough to suggest there was still plenty left in this contest.

It did not require the wisdom of Solomon to imagine the coaches stressing the importance of the opening ten minutes of the second half: for Colfeians, to get an early score and a foothold in the game; for Sutton, to extinguish all hope and force the visitors into damage-limitation mode.

The men from Horn Park could not have asked for a more encouraging start as the powerful running of centre Louis Baker contemptuously brushed aside potential tacklers for a stunning solo score from halfway after barely a minute. Ryan Napper's conversion appeared to be perfection until the wind had the final say, leaving his team trailing 10–28.

A couple of minutes later, the exceptional Laurence Wise was forced from the field having been squashed beneath a considerably heavier opponent. As the pessimists trawled their memories for record reversals, the hosts responded in classical fashion. Sam Lennie made an eye-catching break, marauding into the opposition half and leaving tacklers in his wake or dumped on their behinds. Agu Benson continued the attack, cutting inside, and prop Dan Johnson arrived in support to score. The conversion never threatened, but Sutton had the comfort of a 33–10 lead with 25 minutes to play.

Old Colfeians were not deterred by this reverse and threw themselves at the Sutton defences with fury. Inches from a try they were penalised, and as hard as they tried it appeared that the home defences would not be breached. In the final ten minutes OC's full-back Chris Harris changed the game with individual brilliance. A mesmerising run from 40 metres deserved a try; he was denied by the last man, but Ryan Napper was in support to cross the whitewash. The No.10 converted his score for 17–33.

Five minutes later, the elusive Harris was on halfway being pushed towards touch. He caressed the ball between on-rushing tacklers, re-gathered it and disappeared over the horizon for a fabulous score that spoke volumes for his vision. It was one-way traffic and belief was coursing through Colfeian veins as the lead narrowed to 33–24.

Before the Chris Harris show, Sam Lennie had left the field with a knock. The hooker re-entered the fray as Sutton worked their way into the opposition 22. From a perfectly executed catch-and-drive from an attacking lineout, the irrepressible Lennie scored his second try. Bunting converted for 40–24 and Sutton had finally secured the win. Moments later, the contest was over.

Arguably, this was Sutton's best performance of the campaign so far. The tempo, fluency and handling in the first half were exceptional in the conditions as they spread the ball wide at every opportunity. Wingers Archie Fitzgerald and Agu Benson offered a formidable threat on the flanks, avoiding being ushered into touch with their combination of strength, skill and rugby intelligence. The mobile back-row trio of Rea, Jones and Hegarty were always on hand to offer continuity. Laurence Wise provided the tempo at 9 while Freddy Bunting orchestrated the plays from 10.

The front row of Johnson, Lennie and Mount not only provided a stable set piece but also offered a great deal around the paddock, including three tries. It was a superb team effort from 1 to 18.

No team will relish playing Old Colfeians this season. The front-row trio of Rameaux, Holland-Oliver and Agorioge boast over 300 appearances and were a formidable unit. The centre combination of Baker and Storey were the creative hub in an experienced back division. The icing on the cake is the attacking threat of Chris Harris, who countered with great intent. They were unfortunate to be missing some regulars, leaving them short of their usual heft in the back five. In the second period they came back strongly and deservedly were rewarded with a bonus point, coming close to a second as the clock wound down.

Next Saturday, 11 October, Sutton visit the historic Crescent Farm for an encounter with one of their oldest rivals, Sidcup RFC. At this early stage of a long season the Black and Whites lie second in the league behind Beckenham, who also have the maximum 20 points from four outings.

Sutton & Epsom:
Bennion, Fitzgerald, Scott, Bibby, Benson, Bunting (capt), Wise, Johnson, Lennie, Mount, McTaggart, Duey, Rea, Jones & Hegarty.
Replacements: Boaden, Tame & Munford.

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Old Colfeians:
Harris, Ellis, Storey, Baker, Mutongwizo, Napper, Spaczil, Rameaux, Holland-Oliver, Agorioge, Collins, Ramdhan, Amor, Moles & Correa.
Replacements: Bantango, Blythe & Burkett.

John Croysdill

Image credit Robin Kennedy

Reigatian Hoodoo Broken: Sutton and Epsom Scale the Heights

22 December 2025



Old Reigatian 14 Sutton and Epsom RFC 49. Saturday 20th September.

Sutton and Epsom may have enjoyed the better start to the campaign with two victories compared to their opponent's two defeats but Old Reigatian could be considered the Black and Whites' Kryptonite. Since resuming league hostilities in September 2023 the Old Boys have won all four encounters amassing 142 points and scoring 20 tries. So for Rugby Lane supporters the 49-14 win was a most welcome end to the historical hoodoo.

There was a welcome return to the ranks for Gareth O'Brien and Sam Lennie but hat-trick hero Rob Hegarty and Ben Tame were absentees from the Sutton and Epsom squad. There was also the reappearance of Eric Duey in the second row after an absence of biblical proportions of three seasons. Referee Pierce Young's whistle announced the next chapter in the Old Reigatian v Sutton and Epsom story. Sutton and Epsom were to enjoy the first half benefits of the slope and the wind. This was amply demonstrated when Tom Lennard seized a loose ball in his 22 and kicked over the OR line for a drop out in the early moments.

Sutton and Epsom's first chance came after five minutes with a 5-metre lineout. The ball was overthrown and devoured by the defence and the opportunity squandered. But Ewan McTaggart, wearing the temporary burden of captaincy lightly on his broad shoulders, charged down the clearance and with almost divine intervention it landed in Eric Duey's hands for the try. Tom Lennard added the extras for a 7-0 lead. The remainder of the first quarter was entertaining fare as expansive play was matched by dogged defence by all concerned. In the 20th minute Sutton and Epsom were held up over the line but Reigatian relief from the long clearance was fleeting. The ball was run back and Gareth O'Brien sidestepped his man near halfway and scorched home for a fine solo score. Tom Lennard extended the advantage to 14-0.

On the half hour the sizeable following support from Rugby Lane were applauding their third try. A 5-metre lineout appeared to have been superbly defended as the packs slid towards touch but Dan Jones erupted from the heaving masses to score. Tom Lennard maintained his kicking excellence for 21-0. Emboldened by their lead and with Lennard exploiting the slope with intelligent kicking Sutton and Epsom dominated territorially. The valiant home defence once more held up the Black and Whites over their line. Once more it was only a temporary respite. Kyren Ghumra ran the ball back and Sam Lennie saw a gap in a scrambling defence to touch down for the bonus point score. Lennard maintained his 100% record for 28-0.

There was still time for the visitors to add another score to their first period riches. It was arguably the best of the first half five. The forwards provided clean ball on the 22 and it was spun wide. Laurence Wise ran the perfect supporting line from Number 9 to collect an inside pass that opened up the defence and he sauntered home. The Lennard boot made it 35-0 and the referee concluded the half with Sutton and Epsom handsomely placed having made the most of the topography and meteorological assistance.

The hosts would enjoy the benefits of the slope and a strengthening wind. Even with their talented back division and their habitual winning of this fixture a 35-point deficit was considerable, perhaps not Everest but certainly Himalayan in proportions. Old Reigatian began the second half with great intent pegging back the visitors in their 22 and laying siege. It was one-way traffic with 5-metre penalties and lineouts accumulating as the Black and White line was put under the severest pressure. But courageous Sutton and Epsom defence repelled every attack.

Having survived the siege Sutton and Epsom scored on their first visit to their opponent's 22. The returning Sam Lennie brushed aside defenders in his usual imperious manner and passed to his fellow countryman Adam Bibby to score under the posts. Tom Lennard caressed over the conversion for 42-0. As the game entered the final quarter Sutton and Epsom faced disruption in their ranks. They lost Gareth O'Brien through injury and Adam Bibby through indiscretion. The former did not return but the latter reappeared after the mandatory 10-minute breather.

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Finally, Old Reigatian scored a try that their efforts certainly warranted on an afternoon where the scoreboard did not reflect the nature of the contest. The score followed another period of sustained pressure. The ball was relayed to the left and Jonny Bridges manufactured the break and having been tackled stretched to the line to score. He celebrated his try with a finely struck conversion for 7-42. The weather deteriorated as the wind intensified. The Sutton and Epsom pack was now in the ascendancy but the Old Boys demonstrated immense character and were rewarded with a second try. Exploiting a retreating opposition the impressive Number 9 Max Nicol sniped with clinical efficiency to score. Bridges' kick made it 14-42 with five minutes left on the clock.

Sutton and Epsom had the final word with a magnificent seventh try. Steve Munford passed and looped near halfway to create an overlap. Agu Benson stormed down the touchline and passed to fellow flyer Kyren Ghumra who timed his pass to perfection for the ubiquitous Dan Jones to score triumphantly under the posts. The 100% Man, Tom Lennard, made it 49-14 and brought his personal tally to 14 points. In the dying moments a final Reigatian attack was thwarted by an interception near the Sutton and Epsom line to deny the hosts a consolation.

For the Black and Whites Tom Lennard had a first-rate afternoon, kicking superbly, whether tactically or bisecting the uprights, and marshalling a back division that impressed in defence and attack. The team defended superbly and the seven tries reflected their attacking intent in a strong overall display. Old Reigatian are in transition with the departure of familiar faces but they should take heart from their defence and resilience from the first to the last minute. Their backs were slick with ball in hand and will pose a threat to all teams. Max Nicol at 9 has the quality to get the best out of the backs and their collective passion and hard work in defence will provide a solid platform for improved results.

The league has a Saturday off whilst England play Canada for the World Cup. The competition returns on October 4th when Sutton and Epsom host Old Colfeians at Rugby Lane.

Sutton and Epsom: O'Brien, Benson, Scott, Bibby, Ghumra, Lennard, Wise, Johnson, Lennie, Mount, McTaggart (c), Duey, Rea, Jones and Finney. Reps: Boaden, Fitzgerald and Munford.

Old Reigatian: Woodford, Coyle, Parker, Allen (c), Bridges, Holder, Nicol, Garrec, Marshall, Collister, Grant, Jones, Blackburn, Brooks C. and Niven. Reps: Lee, Brooks O. and Flynn.

John Croysdill

Photo credit: Robin Kennedy

Dartford fail to bridge the gap with Epsom rugby

22 December 2025



Sutton and Epsom RFC 33 Dartfordians 29 Saturday 13th September

Last season's meetings between these two clubs reflected the Sutton and Epsom campaign. The early encounter in Bexley was one of several tight matches where the Black and Whites prevailed. The Rugby Lane return bore witness to a rampant Sutton and Epsom win in their end of season pomp. However, the hosts were greatly assisted by injuries to the experienced forward duo of prop Stephen Garrett and lock Lewis Potter who collided before the break and went straight to A and E. On the opening Saturday Sutton and Epsom enjoyed a resounding 49-19 success at Bromley RFC. In contrast, Dartfordians endured a chastening 80-14 loss at the hands of a sadistic Sidcup. There was mitigation for this dire defeat as the Kent Club were handicapped by absentees on a golf weekend. At this time of asking the sides shared ten tries and Sutton and Epsom won a hard fought contest 33-29.

Sutton and Epsom had three changes to their squad with the return of the experienced front row duo of Boaden and Mount. In addition, there was the opportunity to see the mercurial talents of the lesser-spotted Archie Fitzgerald on the wing. The shrill blast of Mr Simon Matthews' whistle initiated proceedings with the visitors playing towards the Cabbage Patch on an afternoon of changeable weather. Dartfordians started brightly before a superb 50/22 from Tom Lennard put Sutton and Epsom on the offensive. The Kent side's resolute defence turned over the ball on their line and their bold counter was rewarded as moments later they were back in the Sutton half. It took another fabulous 50/22, this time by Adam Bibby, to set up another scoring opportunity. Rob Hegarty duly obliged surging over the line from a 5-metre scrum for the first try of his personally profitable afternoon. Tom Lennard added the conversion for a 7-0 after 17 minutes.

Not downcast the Dartfordians started to dominate possession and territory. A defensive lapse had the hosts defending deep in their 22 before a clearing kick. There followed a stunning break by fly half Gubby Thomas that had Sutton scrambling to cover a chip ahead. After a momentary respite Sutton conceded a penalty only for the away team to kick the ball dead in search for the attacking lineout. However, it was not long before they had another chance to punish a Sutton

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indiscretion. This time the penalty resulted in a 5-metre lineout. The ball was secured and winger Liam Brencher was stopped on the line before lock Ryan Chandler forced the ball over for the try. The conversion went astray but with the first period drawing to a close the Bexley-based side only trailed 5-7 and the scoreboard now reflected more accurately the balance of play as driving rain descended upon Rugby Lane.

Crucially Sutton and Epsom raised their game scoring two tries deep into time added on. On both occasions it was the forwards who earned the garlands. Second row Kieran Finney was the first scorer touching down under the posts. As the away team discussed the score in a huddle Tom Lennard hit the upright limiting Sutton's lead to 12-5. Soon after the Rugby Lane crowd were applauding another try. Following a searching kick another lineout ball was secured and Rob Hegarty was celebrating his second score. With the successful conversion the whistle went to end the first half. At 19-5 to Sutton and Epsom the pristine new scoreboard's score rather flattered the hosts who had struggled to find the fluency of last week. Dartfordians were unfortunate to trail at all let alone by 14 points as they had the better of the half in those important currencies of territory and possession. The visiting forwards had carried powerfully and full back Joe Scott's incursions into the line had been a constant threat.

Alex Mount announced his return at the start of the second half with a thunderous tackle on Harvey Whyte but the centre managed to complete a precise kick to the Sutton 22. The Dartfordians pack resembled an unstoppable juggernaut as the catch and drive's relentless advance of 15 metres had a sense of foreboding and inevitability with flanker Kieran Clarke scoring. Sutton's lead was reduced to 19-10. The wind dropped but the rain increased as conditions became difficult for handling. Quality back row play from Dan Jones won Sutton a penalty that was advanced to the corner. The lineout was dropped but recovered by Mount before his fellow prop Dan Johnson lost control near the line. The reinvigorated Kent players confidently ran the ball from their line and averted the danger.

Soon after, another penalty gave the Rugby Lane team chance to make amends with a lineout in the opposition 22. Finney secured the ball and Howes broke into the open field. The forwards carried up to the line before scrum half Laurence Wise espied a route to the line to score the Black and Whites' bonus point try. Tom Lennard stepped up to make it 26-10. As the final quarter approached Dartfordians went in search of a way back into the game. The crowd thought that Mr Matthews was raising his hand aloft for a try but inches from the line he spotted an infringement. Undeterred the visitors continued to lay siege and finally they were rewarded as fullback Joe Scott scored by the uprights and Thomas Gubby added the conversion as the margin was now 17-26 with 10 minutes remaining.

With the match back in the balance Sutton and Epsom produced some of their best rugby. The rain stopped, the sun shone and a rainbow covered the ground. For Sutton and Epsom there was a pot of gold at the end of it. They declined a kickable penalty in front of the posts 30 metres out as Tom Lennard drilled the ball towards the corner. A clean catch, the pack on the move and a jubilant Rob Hegarty completed his hat trick. With his fourth successful kick Lennard made it 33-17 with 5 minutes of normal time remaining and one would have thought that the win had been secured.

There was plenty of time to add there having been several stoppages for injuries and the visitors dominated every second of it. After five minutes of time added on Dartfordians scored their bonus point fourth try courtesy of a wonderful solo effort from Harvey Whyte who glided through the defence. Soon after a stunning run from Joe Scott from halfway was thwarted by a timely cover tackle from Kyren Ghumra. The Kent club continued to turn the screw as the field was littered with Sutton players requiring assistance. The visitors scored with the final play as Harry Wright crossed the whitewash to gain their second bonus point. The contest culminated with Thomas Gubby's conversion to leave the final score 33-29 to the Black and Whites.

In a keenly contested match that could have been claimed by either side the turning point was the two late Sutton and Epsom tries in the first half. The Dartfordians inspired by the athleticism of locks Chandler and Akinsete carried powerfully all game. Joe Scott made considerable yardage from 15 in a back division not afraid to run the ball out of defence. After a traumatic game last weekend every supporter from Kent will take great heart from how strongly their team have bounced back and finished strongly to push Sutton and Epsom to the very end. Once again scrum half Laurence Wise was not only at the heart of Sutton's play but also scored a try. Rob Hegarty's return of three tries highlighted once again how clinical he is when he has the ball in the last few metres. Sutton and Epsom were not at their best which was more credit to the visitors than to the detriment of the host's play but they earned the spoils for another 5 points.

Next Saturday Sutton and Epsom travel to Old Reigatian for a 3pm start against their Surrey rivals who are looking for their first win of the campaign following defeats to Old Colfeians and Sidcup. Dartfordians will host Beckenham to complete the testing trio of the top three for their opening three fixtures this campaign.

Sutton and Epsom
Ghumra, Benson, Scott, Bibby, Fitzgerald, Lennard, Wise, Johnson, Howes, Boaden, McTaggart ©, Finney, Rea, Jones and Hegarty. Reps: Mount, Tame and Munford.

Dartfordians
Scott, Kpaka, Soler-Gomez, Whyte, Brencher, Gubby, Chappell, Garrett, Hooban, Chapman, Chandler, Akinsete, Williams, Clarke and Wright. Reps: Banks, Tuffley and Taylor.

Photo credit : Robin Kennedy

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