

Epsom rugby scrape a point lead over Gravesend

2 December 2024



Gravesend 22 Sutton & Epsom RFC 23. Saturday 30th November.

Sutton and Epsom RFC visited Gravesend RFC in October last season at the height of the high tackle hysteria. In a match not so much punctuated by penalties as strangled by draconian enforcement Freddy Bunting collected five penalties. However, the hosts won 36-29 outscoring the visitors 6-2 in tries with a brace of penalty tries and a double from the totemic Samraj Chahal. The Black & Whites returned to the delightful Rectory Field facility that rather contrasted the unflattering portrayal of Gravesend in Andrea Arnold's recent film "Bird". One hopes the council were well compensated for the depiction of their town that raises the question: Is all publicity good publicity? S&E absquatulated again with the points sneaking home 23-22.

Sutton fielded the same starting XV that had snuck past Thurrock in the previous round, apart from an esoteric switch for the wingers. Tom Boaden returned to the bench and was joined by debutant Sam Lennie, the last arrival of the Christchurch triumvirate, who had flown in from New Zealand and not Dorset. An accident in the environs of Clackett Lane delayed the Sutton arrival but their blushes were spared as Mr Goksaran's tardiness that meant the kick off was delayed until 3:15pm. Finally, Freddy Bunting kicked off to the petanque end. Gravesend, belying their lowly league status, dominated the early exchanges. However, they struggled to cross the gain line owing to S&E's resolute defence. They squandered two opportunities in the opening ten minutes. Firstly, losing an attacking line out deep in the 22 and secondly knocking on with the line in sight.

Captain Bunting settled the visitors' nerves with an immaculate 45-metre strike for 3-0. His side now impressed with excellent continuity as rapid recycling aided forwards and backs alike. Gravesend, under severe pressure, conceded a penalty 10 metres out. The ball was prodded to the corner. The perfectly executed catch and drive ushered hooker Dan Jones over the whitewash for the opening try. Freddy Bunting's pin point accuracy made it 10-0. Five minutes later the Kent side found themselves in similar travails when they were not only turned over in their 22 but compounded the error by conceding a penalty. Another kick to the corner, another line out, another catch and drive ... another outcome. The home pack halted their adversaries so it was spun wide to winger Angus Findlay whose sublime footwork left the defender grasping thin air as the second try was scored. The metronomic Bunting converted for 17-0.

The Gs looked for a rapid response and the inspirational Samraj Chahal went blind from a scrum. Rhys Betts then chipped ahead and a try was only thwarted by magnificent cover by Tom Lennard. Moments later Sutton provided the opposition with some degree of consolation when they conceded a penalty under the posts. Rhys Betts accepted the gift and the hosts trailed 3-17. The first half concluded shortly afterwards with no further addition to the scoreboard.

The second period started inauspiciously for the hosts when they kicked the restart out on the full. This was to be a rare blemish as they proceeded to besiege the Sutton 22. Following ten minutes of intense pressure it was centre Zac Filmer's perfectly angled run that opened the second half scoring with a try by the posts. Rhys Betts added the simple conversion and the home team trailed 10-17. Within five minutes a raucous Rectory Field sensed an equalising score but their team conceded a penalty one yard from glory. Undeterred by that misfortune the revitalised hosts continued to press for points. Finally, on the hour mark they levelled the scores. Sutton debutant Sam Lennie received a yellow card for a high tackle. The 3-point easy option was declined. They were rewarded when the redoubtable Samraj Chahal forced his way over. With Rhys Betts converting the scores were level 17-17 as Gravesend had scored 17 unanswered points. With S&E reduced to 14 the pendulum had swung dramatically in the favour of the Kent side.

Despite the numerical inferiority Sutton were the next to score. With Mr Goksaran hovering like Azrael the visitors were awarded a penalty and Freddy Bunting recaptured the lead at 20-17. A minute later following excellent work from Jordan Huie S&E had another penalty for a late tackle. A simple 3 points for a 23-17 lead, meaning Gravesend would need a goal to regain the lead, was declined and the penalty was run instead. The forwards approached the line and thought they had scored via Rob Hegarty. The referee adjudicated that he had been held up over the line. A relieved home XV cleared long.

Sutton were returned to their full complement but only momentarily. Ben Tame cleared out a ruck and was issued a yellow for high contact. Sensing blood Gravesend also declined an easy kick and went for glory. From the ensuing penalty their bravery was rewarded as replacement Nathan Fouche powered over. To add salt to the wounds of the Sutton Society For Kicking All Penalties Rhys Betts conversion drifted wide and Gravesend led 22-20. However, a couple of minutes later Freddy Bunting was given a long-range attempt from the sidelines to recapture the lead. Demonstrating as few nerves as a false tooth he bisected the uprights for 23-22 as the game entered time added on.

Gravesend immediately had a chance following a fabulous 50-22 kick that nestled in an ideal spot for an attacking line out. Sutton set themselves for the catch and drive and did not contest the ball. Remarkably the throw was not straight. The hosts cleared to halfway but then they conceded a penalty which saw them retreating back to the corner to defend another close-range line out. This time, roared on by the Rectory Field faithful, the Gs pack secured the ball. Numerous phases saw the hosts crab their way under the posts. The heroic Sutton defence refused to be breached and turned over the ball. From the scrum they secured the ball and dismissed it from the paddock for a very hard earned 23-22 victory.

Sutton played some of their most effective rugby of this campaign in the first half. Their defence was miserly, they were

quick to capitalise on errors and impressed with ball in hand. They were clinical in the opposition 22 when scoring two tries. The second half transformation said more for the attributes of Gravesend than Sutton's deficiencies. Rob Hegarty's dynamism was a focal point throughout, Jordan Huie's running out of defence was exhilarating and Tom Lennard's all around game won plaudits. Close games come down to small margins and in Freddy Bunting S&E held all the aces in all the decks.

For Gravesend this was an unwanted hat trick being their third loss in a row by a solitary point to add to a single point defeat on the opening day to Old Reigatian, not to mention a 2-point deficit to Reeds. Such a run would make Jonah feel fortunate by comparison. The hosts defended aggressively denying Sutton time and space. They varied their game with forwards, backs and some astute kicking. They were undone by missed opportunities as more than one vital line out was lost and overlaps in the 22 were not perceived. In addition, they were up against a formidable kicker who missed nothing as he made the challenging look elementary.

Next Saturday December kicks off at 2pm with a visit from Reeds Weybridge who are proudly perched third in the league. The equivalent fixture last season culminated the campaign with Sutton winning with a Rob Hegarty try on the final play for a 12-7 success.

Sutton & Epsom

O'Brien, Huie, Bibby, Bunting ©, Findlay, Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Jones, Gibson, Glanville, McTaggart, Tame, Davies & Hegarty.

Replacements: Boaden, Lennie & Hilton.

Gravesend

White, Huckle, Cooke, Filmer, Bruce M, Bruce G, Betts, Alderson, Dadson, Brooker, Bird, Brett, Stener, Chahal & Hewitt.

Replacements: Fouche, Hampshire & Fisher.

Sutton & Epsom 33 Thurrock 29

2 December 2024

Saturday 16th November: For Sutton supporters of a pessimistic disposition the arrival of Thurrock, winless after eight matches, would have brought back miserable memories of a trip to Southend in November 2017.

The Saxons broke their duck with a last second penalty that gave them a 32-31 first win of the season after eight straight defeats. For the optimists, that was years ago, away from home and the Black & Whites had defeated the league leaders in their last two Rugby Lane appearances. On this occasion the Rugby Gods smiled on Sutton & Epsom as they sneaked home with a last play try to inflict an agonising 33-29 loss on Thurrock who continue their quest for their Holy Grail of a win.

Sutton saw a welcome return from injury for Gareth O'Brien at 15 and for Josh Glanville following his Marrakesh meanderings. On an overcast afternoon Thurrock initiated proceedings attacking the clubhouse end. They were once more into the search for a first win for their dear friends back at Oakfield. It was a scrappy start with a penalty and a free kick awarded at the first two scrums and the S&E line out, that has been a source of strength this season, proving to be unreliable. The Black & Whites opened the scoring with a Freddy Bunting penalty for 3-0. Undeterred the visitors proceeded to monopolise the game. Their forwards went through the phases and advanced steadily. Thurrock opened their account with a moment of the highest quality. Number 10 Charlie Chitty, with immaculate precision, chipped to the flank where winger Elliot Chew timed his leap to perfection to gather the ball under pressure and score in the corner. Harry Reynolds impressively converted from the touchline for a 7-3 lead.

The Black & Whites proceeded to litter the paddock with new and interesting ways to thwart their progress: misjudging a kick; kicking out on the full; gifting penalties and losing line outs. Eventually the visitors were presented with a kickable penalty that was gratefully accepted by Harry Reynolds as the Essex men extended their advantage to 10-3 at the end of the first quarter. A degree of urgency awoke the hosts and Tom Lennard recovered a charge down as Thurrock tried to clear from their 22. Fluent passing found Jac Davies in space and his deft footwork presented Freddy Bunting with a try. The Captain clipped over the conversion to level the scores at 10-10. The flow of the game was negated by errors and no infringement went unpunished under the gaze of Mr Morris. For example, a baffled Sutton pack were halted as they tried to execute a catch and drive from 10 metres out due to one of their fraternity joining in.

With the interval approaching both sides looked to the boot for territorial advantage but more often than not gifted possession to the opposition. Sutton had recaptured their defensive relish and cut down the visiting ball-carriers who barely made a yard despite many phases. They were rewarded with a turnover from a knock on and a subsequent penalty in the middle of the park. The Bunting boot failed to find touch but the captain made amends by collecting the return. The Black & Whites surged into the 22 and won a penalty. Steve Munford pounced with a quick tap and flanker Dan Jones put through Adam Bibby for his first Sutton try. Freddy Bunting added the extras for a 17-10 lead.

From the restart the Tees were awarded a penalty that they kicked to the corner to provide the perfect attacking platform. They secured possession and their advance was halted. The initial thrust was denied but moments later they exploited the narrow side to squeeze in at the corner.



Replacement prop Ben Flatt's try was music to Thurrock ears. Though the conversion failed the visitors finished the first period trailing 15-17 with the contest very much in the balance. The second half opened with the first opportunity coming to the hosts after five minutes. Freddy Bunting took a simple three points from a penalty adjacent to the uprights near the 22. Leading 20-15 Sutton were fortunate moments later when Thurrock squandered a huge advantage. Overwhelmingly outnumbered by the visiting hordes who were sweeping into the S&E 22 the hosts were saved by an unforgiving pass that arrived at the bootlaces rather than the midriff. Moments later Freddy Bunting was adding a dollop of sodium chloride to the freshest of wounds. With a fabulous penalty from near to halfway the captain put his side 23-15 up. The Black & Whites appeared to be in the ascendancy and put together their best passage of play. Wonderful interchanges and telling support saw the joyous site of Rugby Lane's replacement prop, Callum Hilton, diving over the line to score a fabulous try. Celebrations were cut short as the referee was concerned over the grounding of the ball and awarded Thurrock the drop out. A deflated Sutton suddenly saw a probable 15-point lead snatched from their grasp.

The game entered the final quarter with Sir reminding the hosts that the mounting penalty count in their 22 had reached the point of no return and he would be reaching for his pocket sooner rather than later. The Oakfield team took their chance. Despite dogged defence in the corner flanker Ben Timson forced his way over. Harry Reynolds made it a one-point game with another fine conversion as Thurrock trailed 22-23. Not for the first time, and certainly not for the last time, the Rugby Lane fans were delighted to applaud another Bunting penalty as he made light work of a 45-metre effort from the middle of the pitch. The hosts were 26-22 up with ten minutes on the clock. Sutton pressed hard to put away their stubborn opponent. Another quickly taken penalty looked like paying dividends again but the stunning break ended when a speculative inside pass in the 22 that came to nought.

Tension rose and the momentum switched to Thurrock as they entered the Black & White

A combination of careless play and poor discipline undermined the hosts and resulted in a Thurrock line out 10 metres from the line. The catch and drive was halted but at a cost as the referee lost patience and removed Josh Glanville with a yellow card. Now it was a 5-metre line out. The Thurrock forwards threw themselves time and again against the Sutton line. It was classic defence against patient and controlled attack with every inch being contested to the full. Finally, it went to flyhalf Charlie Chitty who dummied and skipped through the gap to score. Harry Reynolds added the extras and Thurrock led, in time added on, by 29-26.

Right on cue the Black & Whites produced their best rugby of the afternoon. The Bunting restart descended with the pack perfectly just outside the 22 and the ball was regained. The referee awarded Sutton a penalty but they declined the opportunity to level the scores. It was all out attack against heroic defence. The referee indicated a penalty advantage and S&E pressed on and spun it wide. The crowd roared as Jordan Huie sprinted down the touchline in classical style to score but there was a forward pass. Back for a penalty in front of the posts and again the kick was rejected. From the tapped penalty flanker Dan Jones exploited a tiny gap in the defensive wall and lock Ewan McTaggart was on hand for the glory of the winning try. Freddy Bunting, having wrapped up his half century of caps at Dartfordians last week, notched his century of points for the season with the last kick of the game. Sutton had won 33-29.

At present for Thurrock it must feel like they have offended the Goddesses Tyche and Fortuna with clowders of black cats haunting their every turn. The team are no doubt exhausted from taking the positives from every game. However, this match brought their first bonus point for four or more tries and saw their highest points tally to date. Their effort and spirit could not be faulted as illustrated by taking the lead in time added on whereas despondency and a 'here we go again' feeling would have been understandable. Their pack carried well, the Chitty brothers at halfback offer great potential and in Harry Reynolds they have a quality kicker. Hopefully the tide will turn for them sooner rather than later.

Sutton have started to get into that pleasing habit of winning close games which speaks volumes for their fitness, camaraderie and determination. Adam Bibby was outstanding in defence with his ability to make the tackle and be back on his feet in a instant being invaluable and his try was a fitting reward for an excellent afternoon. On a day when the team struggled to find their rhythm they still found a way to win because their defence was again of the highest quality. Next Saturday is another rest from the hurly-burly of league action. The campaign continues on 30th November when the charabanc heads for the Rectory Field for a match with Gravesend.

Sutton & Epsom

O'Brien, Findlay, Bibby, Bunting ©, Huie, Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Jones, Gibson, Glanville, McTaggart, Tame, Davies & Hegarty.

Replacements: Hilton, Rea & Wise.

Thurrock

Frear, Reynolds, Poole, Clifford ©, Chew, C. Chitty, S. Chitty, Miles, Percival, Catchpole, Libby, Watts-Adams, Orr, Timson & Jennings.

Replacements: Flatt, Aminu & Giroud.

Sutton & Epsom Come Back Victorious

2 December 2024

Dartfordians 26 Sutton & Epsom RFC 30. Saturday 9th November.

“When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions.” Good old Bill could have been referencing injury lists afflicting rugby coaches. The Sutton selectors were hoping that the rest weekend would bring better news. For the Black & Whites there was the return to the colours from the sick bay for Messrs Gibson & Wise. “For this relief much thanks” as the Bard would say. Their return to Bourne Road was a nostalgic one for Sutton & Epsom as Dartfordians were one of the 11 teams that composed the original London One table for the 1987-88 inaugural league season. Though S&E had to wait until the last game of the following campaign to play in Bexley as in those days you only played each opponent once. For this time of asking on an afternoon of fluctuating fortunes Sutton eventually prevailed 30-26.

There was a much more winter feel to proceedings this week with not only the earlier 2pm kick off but also the permanently overcast sky and colder temperatures. Freddy Bunting kicked off towards the appropriately named War Memorial Clubhouse following the minute’s silence to commemorate the fallen. The omens looked favourable as probing runs by Jordan Huie set up S&E for an initial assault. The ball was swept wide and Angus Findlay set off for the corner. However, a combination of excellent cover and the pass inside not being cleanly taken meant that the tie remained scoreless. That was to be the last highlight for the visitors for a considerable time. Dartfordians solid set piece and dominant line out provided the platform for the excellent Jarlath Hetherington to dictate terms from 10.

After five minutes the hosts declined an easy 3-point penalty and kicked into the corner. The pack secured the ball and flyhalf Hetherington combined a well-chosen line, deft feet and pure power to score the opening try. His conversion put the icing on his cake for a 7-0 lead. Elliot Soler-Gomez reclaimed the restart for Dartfordians and Sutton conceded a soft penalty soon after. Further pain was denied when Dartfordians throw in was adjudged to be crooked allowing the visitors to clear. Sutton’s next attack ended tamely but they were brought back for a penalty. Captain Bunting stepped up to narrow the gap to 7-3. The Bexley men were soon pressing for another score. The much-improved Sutton defence denied them twice. Firstly, a turnover in the 22 and then when an impatient attacker failed to release the ball with line at Dartfordians mercy. It was third time lucky on the half hour when prop Ted Rackley muscled his way over the whitewash after sustained pressure. Captain Hetherington added the extras for a 14-3 lead.

With the first half drawing to a conclusion Sutton conceded a penalty at a scrum for an injudicious use of a hand, to strike the ball, that was not mistaken for a foot by Mr Garland. Once more the hosts were in prime position in the 22. Possession was secured by the pack and as the Black & Whites went into reverse it was spun wide. There was to be no repeat of the earlier Jarlath Hetherington try as he was felled by two tacklers but crucially he released the ball and lock Connor Faulkes squeezed into the corner. A fabulous touchline conversion by Jarlath Hetherington put his side 21-3 ahead. The half ended with S&E pressing hard for a score to gain a foothold in the contest. A huge overlap was ignored and a simple pass was inexplicably dropped. These errors epitomised a frustrating first forty for S&E whose best work had been negated by out of character mistakes. For the second match in a row Dartfordians re-started with a healthy advantaged.

The previous round they defeated a defiant Old Tiffinians who came close to overturning the deficit. Could Sutton do better or would it be a repeat of their Old Tiffinians experience on their last away day outing? The Black & Whites had the perfect start to the second period. Playing at a high tempo the forwards swarmed into the 22 and were awarded a penalty. The visitors threatened the line before providing Tom Lennard with the ball. The Sutton 10 then made a bid for the highest pass above pitch level in Sutton history as the ball ballooned towards the touchline. Groans turned to cheers as it was held and flipped inside for Matt Symonds to score his first try for the senior side. Freddy Bunting converted from the flank and Sutton trailed 10-23.

The momentum and hope was nearly hastily dented. Perhaps over-confidence coursing through S&E veins made them attempt to run it out against superior numbers from their 22. Having not learned their lesson they eventually conceded a penalty adjacent to the uprights. All assembled at Bourne Road were stunned when the reliable boot of Hetherington failed to extend his sides advantage. Moments later the travelling support were also surprised when Freddy Bunting missed a far more challenging penalty but they have been spoiled by his familiar excellence. Five minutes later he had a far easier opportunity to make amends and Sutton trailed 13-21.

With 15 minutes to play the fates dealt a cruel blow to the hosts to remind one of the opening Shakespearean verse. Having already lost one of their front row to injury a second was forced from the field of play. The remainder of the match had to continue with uncontested scrums and Dartfordians were forced to play with 14. In addition, the talismanic Hetherington also had to watch the denouement from the sidelines as he was helped from the pitch to sympathetic applause. Minutes later Sutton took advantage. Excellent pressure and swift continuity was rewarded by a try from the forwards. Flanker Dan Jones was the man on the spot to benefit with the score. The Bunting boot made it a one-point game as Dartfordians held a precarious 21-20 lead.

As Sutton & Epsom pressed for the lead they won another penalty and Bunting put his team 23-21 ahead with a minute remaining. However, there would be considerable time to be added on due to the earlier injuries. Then the Bunting boot became influential again. He struck a wonderful clearance using his allegedly weaker left foot to win a 50/22. From the attacking lineout the forwards delivered. The ball was secured and the catch and drive presented Dan Jones with his second try. The conversion was mathematically significant and Bunting bisected the uprights for 30-21 and a vital two-score advantage. All credit to Dartfordians as they redoubled their efforts in search of bonus points. Following the cruel injuries they endured only the most cold hearted would not have viewed hooker Jack Hooban's try, that earned two bonus points, on the final play from a catch and drive as a fair reward in their 26-30 loss.

This was a commendable Sutton comeback from 18 points down made more impressive because it was on the road. Injuries obviously assisted S&E but their second half showing had already hinted at the triumph to come. For Dartfordians a couple of missed opportunities in the first half ultimately proved costly. Rugby Lane will host the next league fixture and Thurrock will be the visitors. In contrast to the last two visitors, Sidcup and Medway, who arrived as league leaders the Essex club have had a tough baptism to this league and are bottom of the table and still searching for a first win.

Sutton & Epsom

Findlay, Huie, Bibby, Bunting ©, Symonds, Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Boaden, Hilton, Tame, McTaggart, Jones, Davies & Hegarty.

Replacements: Gibson, Gerhard & Baker.

Dartfordians

Cappuccio, Nissinen-Le, Soler-Gomez, Taylor J, Adams, Hetherington, Taylor P, Rackley, Hooban, Chapman, Potter, Faulkes, Williams, Wright & Chandler.

Replacements: Tuffley, Heylen & Brent.

Miracle with Medway

2 December 2024



For the hosts it was a Saturday of availability Armageddon with an injury list mounting that targeted the front and back rows. Players of yesteryear were called to arms and the 2nd XV was ransacked as such resources would have been familiar to Old Mother Hubbard. Jac Davies was the only debutant as the scrum half pitched in as an open-side flanker. In contrast, Medway who have enjoyed a remarkable consistency in selection, with their sizeable travelling support from Priestfields, looked forward to another showing of "The Usual Suspects". To add to the task the Kent side topped the table having only lost their opening game of the campaign. Confounding all expectations Sutton & Epsom, for the second match in a row at Rugby Lane, lowered the colours of the league leaders to be victorious by 22-18. On an overcast but still afternoon that hinted at future rain Freddy Bunting kicked off towards the Cabbage Patch. Understandably confident from their five game winning streak the visitors were immediately on the attack. The eponymous Bullock charged down the paddock from his own 22. Passes were interchanged and a dramatic opening score was denied by the scrambling defence in the S&E 22. Sutton were also lively in the opening exchanges and after five minutes they were awarded a kickable penalty. In a tactical shift of tectonic proportions



Freddy Bunting went for goal and put his team 3-0 up.

This minor irritation did not derail the Medway machine as they stormed into action.

The closer to the line they got the harder the hosts tackled. The ball was spun wide and a try looked probable. The visitors employed that popular rugby elision, the long miss pass, that was met by that familiar foe, the interception. Adam Bibby set off for glory eliciting roars of encouragement as he sped past the grandstand. Frantic defenders closed in from all angles and brought him down ten metres short. However, Mr Richardson's whistle offered the consolation of a second penalty. With ten minutes on the clock Freddy Bunting doubled the advantage to 6-0. Five minutes later, another indiscretion, another penalty and another Bunting three points for 9-0.

The visitors were determined to put the upstart hosts firmly in their place. Almost fifteen minutes of unbroken possession, pressure and territorial dominance ensued.

Galvanised by their lead and confident in their defensive unity the Black & White line held fast. A couple of penalties were kicked by Medway for lineouts. Unfortunately, during this passage of play Sutton lost outside centre Finlay Scott to injury and were forced to reshuffle the backs as Adam Bibby went to 13 and Alfie Baker came off the bench to play on the wing. On the half hour the table-toppers were awarded another penalty and decided on going for gold. Harrison Fermor bisected the uprights to trail 3-9.

It was Sutton & Epsom's turn to attack but a probing Bunting kick keep appeared to nestle harmlessly in the in-goal area under the supervision of John Sipawa. Remarkably the winger knocked on the stationary ball to gift Sutton a 5-metre scrum. The home team ran into a red and amber wall and were turned over and Medway kicked the subsequent penalty to the

The lineout was overthrown and eager Sutton hands gathered the ball. Replacement prop Richard Madadangoma rampaged forward before the backs were released. Slick hands and accurate passing was rewarded as fullback Austin Bell timed his entry into the line to perfection to score. Freddy Bunting converted from the flank and S&E led 16-3.

Medway went in search of a score before the break. A neat lineout move thrown to the front man tried to catch Sutton napping but it came to nought. Soon afterwards there was another penalty to the Black & Whites followed by a stern lecture to Medway lock Peter Cole. The first half ended without any further additions to the scoreboard. The teams turned around with S&E leading 16-3. The makeshift Sutton & Epsom XV were on course for a major upset but everyone at Rugby Lane was expecting more of the same in the second half, relentless Medway pressure. Both sides gathered in a huddle unleashing a primal scream and prepared for battle in the second period.

The opening five minutes were very positive for the Black & Whites, from the secure Glanville take of the restart to winning a scrum against the head. S&E had a free ball and Freddie Bunting attempted a drop goal from distance. It drifted wide but he had the consolation of a long-range penalty to extend the lead. The distance was just beyond his limit and Medway touched down under their posts. Soon the visitors were refreshing their XV from the bench and pinning Sutton in their 22 with searching kicks. The vital first score of the half went to the league leaders after a dozen minutes. A determined run down the touchline by John Sipawa burst through the initial tackle and though he was felled by the cover he did wonderfully well to stretch out a telescopic arm as his momentum took the ball over the line. Harrison Fermor's touchline conversion failed but the morale-boosting try made it 16-8.

Moments later Medway conceded yet another kickable penalty and Freddy Bunting obliged with three more points for 19-8. The visitors' frustration with the arbiter of truth and justice overflowed and a couple of minutes later a vocal objection to a decision from Mr Richardson led to an additional 10-metre stroll for the defenders. Once more Captain Bunting tested his kicking powers and again it fell short and the game restarted with a 22 drop out.

The game entered the final quarter and ominously for the home supporters Medway scored their second try. Excellent support play was rewarded as Harrison Fermor was on hand to score in the corner despite the desperate defence. The 15 was unable to add the extras to his try but his side at 13-19 were within a score with plenty of time left on the clock.

The Black & White defence girded their collective loins and continued to tackle ferociously and win vital turnovers. Additionally the pack were causing Medway problems at the scrum. Another blast of the whistle, another penalty near halfway and another shot at goal for Sutton. These penalties may not have impacted the scoreboard but they frustrated the visitors, took vital time off the clock and made them initiate their attacks from their own

The game was becoming more open and there was no rest from the red and amber attacks and pressure. Sutton were most fortuitous when Tom Lennard was charged down that the loose ball returned to the miscreant kicker. The crowd, living every moment, roared on their sides. As the game entered time added on Freddy Bunting had the opportunity to make it a two-score game with a penalty adjacent to the uprights just outside the 22. He voraciously accepted this tasty offering for 22-13.

Medway now threw the entire contents of the kitchen at the Sutton defences. John Sipawa was greeted by three tacklers and bundled into touch. Jac Davies made a wonderful cover tackle as a line break was extinguished. Every phase repelled ate into the clock until the final play. The Kent side were rewarded with a Max Bullock try in the corner and a bonus point but a delighted S&E side knew that the conversion would be followed by the final whistle. The



kick failed and the joyous celebrations began for an outstanding 22-18 victory. The Sutton defence appeared to have been constructed by Aniketos and Alexiades as the Black & Whites summoned up their inner Heracles. It was a classic example of just what can be achieved with team spirit, defensive resolve and commitment to the cause. Medway never stopped attacking and this was epitomised by winger John Sipawa who bounced off tacklers and swatted away defenders in an effort to breach the Sutton defence. The two teams now get a most welcome week off. The season resumes on 9th November when Sutton & Epsom travel to Dartfordians whilst Medway are on the road again with a trip to Thurrock. Sutton & Epsom

Bell, Bibby, Scott, Bunting ©, Findlay, Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Jones, Hilton, Glanville, McTaggart, Gerhard, Davies & Hegarty.

Replacements: Madadangoma, Williams & Baker.

Medway

Fermor, Chalmers, Bullock, Clement ©, Sipawa, Wardzynski, Grice, Nickalls, Knight, Campbell, Cole, Stubbington, Jackson, Gibson & Purslow.

Replacements: Hyde J, Hyde N & Reeves.

Old Tiffinians 41 Sutton & Epsom RFC 19

2 December 2024

The Black & Whites arrived at the Grist Memorial ground having scuppered Sidcup the previous round. That triumph, in a bruising encounter against the erstwhile leaders, came at a cost with the loss of props Gibson and Mount as well as O'Brien and Elliott in the backs. It was not all doom and gloom from the physio's hut as Tom Lennard made his belated first start of the campaign at 10. If there was much to admire last weekend there was plenty to forget this time around. The Old Tiffinians thoroughly deserved their 41-19 success leapfrogging Sutton & Epsom in the league table.

Free from rain, bathed in sunshine and with a gentle breeze upon an immaculate surface the scene was set for a captivating afternoon's entertainment as Freddy Bunting kicked off. The opening Sutton salvoes were quashed by forthright tackling by everyone in an OT shirt as the visitors looked to spread the ball wide to their wings. After ten minutes the Old Boys demonstrated their best phases and enjoyed the bonus of a penalty in the 22. As is the modern vogue they kicked to the corner. Their positive approach was rewarded with a perfectly executed catch and drive from the 5-metre lineout that ushered prop Ross Hobbs over the whitewash for the first try of the afternoon. Though the extras were not added the hosts led 5-0. The OTs were soon on the attack again and assisted by S&E transgressions. Their second entry in the visitors' 22 would result in their second try. Unfortunately, Sutton hooker Peter Gordon had to be replaced by Ben Green after a clash of heads in a try-saving double tackle. On the resumption Tiffinians pressed hard and fine handling saw fullback Max Talman score in the corner and double the lead to 10-0 at the end of the first quarter.

S&E responded swiftly to the second score. Like their opponents a kickable penalty was discarded for the greedier option. The Rugby Lane Number 8 Rob Hegarty forced his way over in the corner from the remorseless march of the catch and drive. Freddy Bunting's touchline effort drifted by the uprights as his newly awakened team trailed 5-10. Sutton had shuffled the pack to line up with a front row triumvirate of debutant replacement Dan Johnson, Tom Boaden took over the hooking duties and Callum Hilton. Though this combination is far from the Black & Whites first choice they performed impressively providing a steady platform and did not take a backward step in the set piece. Five minutes later the visitors had a wonderful opportunity to level the scores after a Tom Lennard break but, as would be the case too often during this entertaining encounter, the ball out to the flank was not gathered.

The first period entered its final phase. Any good work by Sutton was thwarted by either the defensive solidity of Tiffinians or critical errors by the visitors. As the half entered its dying embers the hosts went blind exposing defensive frailty. It looked as if Old Tiffinians would run it in from halfway. Though undone by some S&E scrambling defence they had the consolation of having a scrum deep in the Black & White 22. Centre Tim Fawcett ran an excellent line and evaded a double tackle to score under the posts. It was an example of third time lucky as Sharif Dougramaji slotted the conversion to stretch the lead to 17-5 as Mr Kelvin Pryor's shrill blast of the whistle terminated the first half with OT leading S&E by 17-5.

Any hope for the travelling supporters looked a rather forlorn one as the second half began with more errors. As the hosts attacked towards the S&E 22 it was their turn to concede an unnecessary penalty. Steve Munford took it quickly, Tom Lennard made a searing break with Austin Bell in support who progressed in the OT half and Alfie Baker sped away to the corner to score. The crowd gazed on admiringly at the pulchritudinous Bunting conversion from the touchline. Was this the start of a classic game of two halves and the Sutton revival? A minute later the answer to that hypothetical query was a resounding "No". Poor play at the restart handed the initiative to the Tiffinians who set out their stall in the S&E 22. Three phases later and winger Seb Sabania was bursting through tacklers to score. Sharif



Dougramaji's sweetly struck conversion added to the demoralising impact of the rapid retort to restore the margin to 12 points at 24-12.

The omens continued to point to a home victory. Another Sutton free ball could not rekindle the earlier magic. A kickable penalty was declined and a lineout in the corner was not found. Then the most deflating moment of all was Seb Sabania picking off an interception and running back a fifth try, and his second, from halfway. Sharif Dougramaji accepted the salubrious offering for a 31-12 advantage with a dozen minutes having elapsed in the second period. To epitomise the Sutton decline the restart failed to go ten metres. However, despair was transformed into hope as the pack won a penalty at the set piece. Naturally, the Black & Whites took off lickety-split and were soon in the opposition 22. OT's scrambling defence not only picked off an interception but countered through an enormous clearance kick. Alfie Baker's cover was immediately undermined by fellow wing Arun Watkin's injudicious counter. Sutton were fortunate to escape as Sir reversed a penalty under their posts.

The game was now very open and tries at either end were a probability rather than a possibility. Sutton benefited from a magnificent 50 22 from Tom Lennard to set up their next attack. The home defence rebuffed a couple of sorties before Austin Bell's grubber nestled under the posts. The scuttling full back arrived with the cover and his attempt to nudge the ball forward was viewed as dangerous play as he made contact with the defender who had stoically fallen on the loose ball. This was the first of a string of penalties that throttled potential attacks for both XVs. The next score came from that reliable and fertile source: the penalty kicked to the corner. It was S&E's turn to demonstrate their catch and drive efficiency with flanker Dan Jones the beneficiary. The Bunting boot made it a two-score game at 19-31. Old Tiffinians set out to restore their supremacy and a bullocking Sabania run hinted at his hat trick before he was eventually forced to pass inside but the ball was knocked on. Sutton cleared their lines but were soon under the cosh. Josh Glanville received a yellow card endeavouring to turn over the ball. Very sensibly Sharif Dougramaji opted for the kick for goal adjacent to the uprights. The successful kick meant that the hosts led 34-19 with three minutes of regular time left. Not so much as a comfortable points' cushion but more like a massive beanbag occupying most of a living room floor. The contest was over. In time added on Old Tiffinians added an extra layer of gloss to their fine performance. They kicked into the corner for the 5-metre lineout. The unstoppable juggernaut advanced ever onwards and Ross Hobbs collected his second catch and drive try. Sharif Dougramaji celebrated the victory with the conversion and Mr Pryor ended the match with the home team triumphant by 41-19. A week is a long time in politics but it must seem like an eternity for the Rugby Lane faithful as this performance bore no resemblance to their Sidcup success. However, the most significant factor was the quality of the Old Tiffinian performance. Their forwards carried aggressively and effectively with Ross Hobbs and Robert Myddelton in the vanguard. Their defence offered Sutton neither time nor space. When they got to the 22 they were clinical whether with the catch and drive or handling in the backs. The pace and power of Seb Sabania gained the plaudits with a brace of tries in a thoroughly deserved bonus point victory. The Black & Whites created opportunities out wide but poor passing handicapped their progress on numerous occasions. Sutton & Epsom will lick their wounds and look forward to the visit of league leaders Medway to Rugby Lane. Meanwhile the Old Tiffinians departed their Clubhouse to descend upon the 18:24 to Waterloo and serenade the passengers on their way to a night of celebrations.

Sutton & Epsom

Bell, Watkins, Scott, Bunting ©, Baker, Lennard, Munford, Boaden, Gordon, Hilton, Glanville, Tame, Rea, Jones & Hegarty.

Replacements: Johnson, Green & Findlay.

Old Tiffinians

Talman, Segun, Dougramaji, Fawcett, Sabanaia, Taylor, Fowler, Hobbs, Howard-Clarke, Turner, O'Connell, Noeh, Myddelton, Graham & Marshall.

Replacements: Corcoran, Dore & Freeman.

Sutton & Epsom Rugby beat the unbeaten

2 December 2024



On Saturday 11 th October 2014 Sutton & Epsom RFC visited Crescent Farm to play Sidcup who were the early season league leaders of London 1 South after five games. On that day the Black & Whites tore up the form book winning 23-16 with a stunning Kyren Ghumra try manufactured by a perfect kick from Frankie Murray. Almost a decade later to the day it was a sense of déjà vu as high-flying Sidcup arrived at Rugby Lane this time topping Regional 2 South East. The visitors were the only unbeaten team in the league, had secured the maximum 20 points from four wins in which they had scored the most points and conceded the least by a considerable margin. It was not a case of lightning striking twice but more like Thor's hammer descending from the heavens in a cataclysmic explosion such was the intensity and physicality of this superb contest won by S&E by a margin of 12-7.

Freddy Bunting got the ball rolling as Sutton played towards the clubhouse with the permanent threat of rain. The early exchanges ceded little territory before a wonderful kick from Josh Twyford angled into the home 22. The hosts responded with two bone-shaking tackles from Ben Tame, that set the tone for an afternoon not for the fainthearted, and a fine kick from Gareth O'Brien cleared their lines. The ferocity of the tackling and a slippery ball hindered the attacking prowess of both XVs. Kiwi Josh Rea demonstrated his talent with a brace of tackles followed by a fine break, Bunting probed with the boot and Sutton attempted to prise open the visitors' well organised and aggressive defence. The first genuine chance came on the quarter hour when Austin Bell kicked ahead and the covering Seb Ellison was caught as he attempted to run from his line. However, in the ensuing frenetic melee the referee awarded Sidcup a scrum for a knock on. The game continued with great pace whilst thunderous tackling from both defences held the upper hand as time after time ball-carriers were unceremoniously dumped onto their posteriors. With the half hour approaching Josh Twyford perfectly placed kicked settled irritatingly just outside the Sutton 22 and a hesitant Bell, now at 15 after an injury to Gareth O'Brien, kicked out on the full. The visitors failed to prosper as their lineout faltered. From a Sutton scrum Rob Hegarty ducked, weaved and evaded tacklers before offloading to the galloping Glanville who burst to halfway where, as ever, Dan Jones was in support. The ubiquitous flanker set off on one of his increasingly familiar runs and was finally halted by the swarming Sidcup defence in their 22. Sadly this exhilarating attack ended as a pass was delivered to a man who was more trying to get out of the way than storm forward.

The Rugby Lane team's confidence was growing and Bell put through a grubber on halfway and recovered it and chipped over to the 22. The second kick was rather over-egging the custard and a grateful opposition regained the ball. To remind everyone who was the top team Sidcup went onto the attack. An excellent kick-chase established them in the Black & White 22. It was now the moment for their backs to demonstrate some wonderful handling in the wet conditions. Sutton were scrambling on their line defending for their lives. Perhaps it was frustration or impatience but with a try looking probable the Crescent Farm men conceded a penalty by going in from the wrong side. Freddy Bunting thumped the ball to halfway and danger was averted. As the enthralled spectators were contemplating a 0-0 score at the break the deadlock was finally broken. Sidcup 15 Seb Ellison collected a Bunting kick on his 22. His return was not his finest strike but the ball descended into space for the rapidly approaching fullback. A favourable bounce was recovered and Seb Ellison ran the ball back from halfway. The covering Freddy Bunting ushered him to the corner no doubt hoping this would be a 5-point score at worst. Up stepped the experienced Josh Twyford who converted magnificently from the touchline to put the league leaders 7-0 ahead. It was already in time added on but the robust nature of the contest had meant that the medical teams had been on the paddock rather more often than usual rebuilding their troops and there was ten additional minutes. Josh Twyford just failed to increase the visitors' advantage as a long-range penalty drifted wide. Then it was a case of cattywampus in extremis as a Sutton scrum buckled. Fortunately for the hosts the Twyford kick into the corner erred in their favour and sailed out of the dead ball area. The half finally concluded with the Black & Whites pressing for a score.

The Kent men were determined to reaffirm their status and put the Sutton upstarts in their place at the start of the second period as they kicked an early penalty into the corner. S&E were soon in survival mode as they had a scrum 5 metres from their line. Tremendous Sidcup scrummaging drove the Black & White eight over their line at a rate of knots. Steve Munford managed to touchdown to avert the try. Now it was Sidcup's turn to have the put in. The home supporters feared the worst based on the most recent evidence. Incredibly Sidcup conceded a



penalty at the scrum as it wheeled. The hosts gleefully accepted the salvation. Reinvigorated by their defensive resilience they went onto the offensive.

Sutton progress was met by a Sidcup side whose tremendous tackling scythed down all before them. But the Black & Whites were not deterred and started to benefit from a flurry of penalties. The spectators were divided over the perennial question: "Take the three points or kick into the corner?" The team went for the higher tariff option. The excellent S&E lineout secured possession but progress could be measured by inches rather than yards so resilient was the visitors' defence. Then an infringement gave Freddy Bunting a 'free ball' and he kicked to the corner where the ball escaped the clutches of two of his comrades. Another 3 points was declined and this time a huge tackle dislodged a ball giving an escape route for the leaders that they gratefully accepted.

The action switch ends but a lofted kick ahead just drifted into the Sutton 22 and an alert Bunting called for the mark and set off on a counter. Replacement Angus Findlay made a wonderful run into the Sidcup half. The ball came to Lawrence Elliott outside the 22 and to counter the onrushing defence he kicked ahead along the deck. The crowd were distracted as Elliott was poleaxed but Josh Rea kept his eye on the ball and won the race to score. Though Freddy Bunting missed the conversion his side now trailed 5-7.

Mr Willis declared that there were 11 minutes to play as the crowd urged on both teams for another score. Sidcup descended into the Sutton 22. Austin Bell seeking anonymity and respite for an injured shoulder retreated to the flank for a breather. Unaware of his condition he was given the ball close to his line. He kicked for touch but the breeze meant it settled on halfway. Bell was first to the ball and fly-hacked onwards wisely declining to scoop it up on the run. The ball advanced deep into the 22 and S&E regained possession. The ball was sent wide where Jordan Huie collected the pass and ran straight for the corner. A fabulous covering tackle brought him crashing down but he stretched out to score his first try for Sutton. An ecstatic crowd cheers increased when the insouciant Bunting made the touchline conversion look elementary for 12-7. The hosts managed to see out the game without creating unwanted anxiety to record one of their best wins in many seasons.

Any side contemplating beating Sidcup this campaign will need to bring their 'A+Triple Star Game'. The front row triumvirate of Messrs Gibbons, Fordham and Carmen are formidably supported by a powerful back five. With the ageless Josh Twyford as the puppeteer at 10 they have variety in attack and multiple threats. Traditionally their defence has been superbly organised but there is now an almost savage power to their tackling. Indeed both sides dug so deep in defence they might have enjoyed vistas of Bondi beach. Sutton rose to the challenge and matched the league leaders for defensive desire and were neither intimidated nor subdued. Willing forwards carried, the backs attacked at every opportunity and the kicking game was astute. From 1 to 18 the Black & Whites raised their level to new heights. There have been an avalanche of tries in the league so far at Rugby Lane but this was by far the match of a season that is still in its infancy.

Sutton & Epsom

O'Brien, Huie, Scott, Elliott, Bell, Bunting ©, Munford, Boaden, Mount, Gibson, Glanville, Tame, Rea, Jones & Hegarty.

Replacements: Hilton, Green & Findlay.

Sidcup

Ellison, Masters, Leek, Smith, Keeley ©, Twyford, Sullivan, Gibbons, Fordham, Carmen, Clarke, Stock, Ruff, Healey & West.

Replacements: Conlon, Williams & Pooley.

Image courtesy Robin Kennedy

Rare rugby draw for Epsom side

2 December 2024



Battersea Ironsides 19 Sutton & Epsom 19. Saturday 28th September

A year ago the 2023-4 Ironsides vintage were on top of the table having opened their account with 80 points against Gravesend and followed that up with bonus point wins over Sidcup and the Cornish. This current Battersea brew have been battle hardened and forged into steel by a trio of nail-biting finishes. Unbeaten at Garratt Green with a one-point and a three-point victory over Thurrock and Beckenham but bettered by three on the road at Reeds Weybridge. For the high scoring visitors it was a case of wanting to return to winning ways. At the final whistle, after a gripping match, the sides could not be separated as the scoreboard read 19-19.



Players and spectators alike palavered peacefully onwards into the unclouded jollity of the afternoon. Sutton with the slope and the wind in their favour were unleashed by Freddy Bunting's perfectly flighted kick off. The first foray to the Battersea 22 was led by Ewan McTaggart who is fast becoming a most prominent feature in the S&E pack. The lock forward might be lacking in steatopygia, that comforting feature for Number 8s of yesteryear, but he makes up for that deficiency with his athleticism around the park. In reply a penalty and subsequent lineout provided the hosts with their first attacking platform. Outside centre Charles Jacobs' break was supported by hooker Oliver Lewis before Jacobs carried again. Battersea spun it wide and looked favourites to score in the corner but a wonderful covering tackle by captain Bunting led to a hopeful offload inside which was poached by Gareth O'Brien who was felled by a high tackle. It would not be the only occasion that the Black & White line under severe pressure would be relieved by the impatient hosts conceding a costly penalty.

On the quarter hour Battersea Ironsides were again guilty of failing to convert pressure into points. Awarded a brace of penalties in quick succession from a scrum and then a lineout they were in prime position five metres from the Sutton line. The Rugby Lane forwards refused to yield and the ball was sent to the flank. With defenders dwindling in numbers the hosts were stopped agonisingly close and the ball-carrier executed the most unsubtle of double movements to reach over the line. The observant Mr Howe again awarded Sutton the sweet succour of a penalty. From a certain try conceded, a moment later, Freddy Bunting was pouring a sack load of salt into the gaping wound by calmly notching his first penalty of the afternoon to give Sutton a 3-0 lead. Buoyed by this success Gareth O'Brien made a stunning strike to the Home XV's 22. The ball was recycled and sent wide where Ironsides' 10 Charles Stuart nearly intercepted and both sides were left to rue their chances.

With the half hour fast approaching Gibson replaced Mount in the S&E front row and made an immediate impact with a rampaging carry from a lineout. Soon after Freddy Bunting was admiring his second success of the afternoon as his team extended their advantage to 6-0. The effrontery of the lead despite having less territory and possession spurred the Garratt Park team to greater heights. For the third time an error, with a try looking a distinct possibility, ended an attack but this time the knock on was not fatal as Battersea were brought back for their penalty. The green shirts piled in under the Black & White's posts before releasing the backs and winger Ewan Magee scored in the corner. Charles Stuart regally converted from the touchline to take a 7-6 lead. To pile pelion on ossa S&E lost Matt Whitaker to injury and Ben Green entered the fray. There was still time left in the first period for Sutton & Epsom to restore their lead when Freddy Bunting opted for a kick at goal from within his own half with the final play. It had perfect direction but just lacked the yardage. The sides turned around with Battersea leading 7-6. For the second period the hosts would enjoy not only the topographical advantage but also any favours from the wind. There was the possibility that the cultured boot of Charles Stuart might be the significant factor for the remainder of the contest and that Sutton's superb defensive resolve might be tested in extremis during the second half.

The tactical kicking game was initiated from the outset with a bout of kick tennis that ended in Sutton's favour courtesy of a superior offering by Gareth O'Brien. That the boot might have primacy over the running game was amply demonstrated after a couple of minutes when the dangerous Jacobs shunned the opportunity to run the ball back but rifled a marvellous kick to the

22. As the forwards wrestled for supremacy, the commitment, intensity of carrying and tackling was ratcheted up another notch by both packs. Equally the back divisions marshalled their defences as both XV's went in search for the vital opening score of the half. After 15 minutes it took an astutely angled grubber from Freddy Bunting that bounced up perfectly for winger Austin Bell to break the deadlock. It was a classic example of sporting vision, that priceless ability to see in a split second what others do not in order to create the sublime moment. A majestic touchline conversion by Bunting bisected the uprights and S&E led 13-7.

Sutton held the upper hand for five minutes. The Ironsides forced S&E to their line with a probing kick forcing a lineout ten metres out. Clean ball and a well executed catch and drive saw the hosts trundle irresistibly over the line for their second try. Trailing by a solitary point Charles Stuart's conversation oversaw the restoration of their lead by 14-13. As is so often the case the opposition were given an early opportunity with a penalty from the restart. The Black & Whites owed their chance for the lead to a thunderous tackle from flanker Ben Tame. There was a moment of confusion when the height of the Bunting kick exceeded the diminutive stature of the Battersea uprights but Sutton & Epsom now inched ahead by 16-14. Perhaps distracted by that uncertainty the restart sailed out on the full and Sutton scrummaged on halfway. Moments later there was another indication of the tension telling. An Ironside queried Mr Howe's interpretation of the laws in a tone that was not appreciated and the referee ushered the defenders 10 metres back. If loose lips sink ships then loquacious rugby players cost three points. Freddy Bunting added a fourth penalty to his tally for Sutton to lead 19-14 with a dozen minutes to go plus the extras for stoppages.

Battersea now went in search of points. Their first sortie was cut short when they lost possession on the Sutton 22 and Austin Bell cleared magnificently to the opponent's half. S&E

were on the attack but were thwarted by a Charles Stuart interception and kick that rolled into their 22. Austin Bell covered well to secure the ball on the deck and the Black & Whites were gifted a penalty as a chasing Ironside naively fell on the prostrate Bell. As the game entered time added on it was one-way traffic in favour of Battersea. The visitors were magnificent in defence and thought they had earned a turnover but the hosts were awarded the scrum. Closer and closer the Garratt Park pack advanced to the posts. Avoiding the risk of being held up over the line, with admirable patience under the circumstances, they finally forced their way over by the right hand upright. 19 all and the conversion was a mere formality for a kicker of Stuart's stature. However, Charles Stuart, endured the type of unexpected misfortune that would have been familiar to not only Aeschylus but also his historical namesake as the conversion was missed. Shortly afterwards the referee concluded proceedings and the sides shared the points for a 19-19 draw.

It was a fitting result for two teams that had given their all. For Sutton Ben Green's performance off the bench was redolent of Ed Burton at Guildford in 2015. Green's previous contributions had been predominantly inconsequential minutes off the bench but he revelled in the opportunity at a serious stint at Number 8. He carried with aggression, tackled powerfully and symbolised an outstanding effort by the Sutton pack. No doubt this Battersea side will be contenders for promotion again this season as they have quality in all departments.

The league now takes a week off and the action returns to Rugby Lane when league leaders Sidcup visit on 12 th October. What a difference a year makes, on their last trip in November 2023 they arrived bottom of the league and level on points with Sutton & Epsom with both clubs having only a solitary win to their names in seven outings.

Sutton & Epsom

O'Brien, Watkins, Scott, Elliott, Bell, Bunting ©, Munford, Mount, Gordon, Boaden, Glanville, McTaggart, Tame, Jones & Whitaker.

Replacements: Gibson, Green & Unused: Symonds.

Battersea Ironsides

Baker, Magee, Jacobs, Roberts, Craig, Stuart, Barnard, Chetwynd, Lewis, Batstone, MacPherson, Walton, Dollard, Chitan & Martin.

Replacements: Borup, Humphris & Diamond.

Sutton & Epsom Denied at the Death in Epic Encounter

2 December 2024



Sutton and Epsom RFC 43 v Old Reigations 48. Saturday 21st September 2024.

It has been a Jekyll & Hyde start to the campaign for Sutton & Epsom. However, the reality dates back to Epictetus and his motto that has been adopted by coaches from around the globe: "Control the Controllables". The one aspect out of your control is the standard of the opposition and Beckenham last Saturday provided a far sterner test than the opening day Old Colfeians. Last season Old Reigatian did the double over S&E in a couple of high scoring contests. They started by winning a fluctuating game at home 35-29 before a first half blitz was the basis of their second success at Rugby Lane by 38-21. New heights were reached on Saturday with a dizzying 12-try spectacular with the tries equally distributed as Old Reigatian hung on in a fabulous finale to win by 48-43 and continue their unbeaten start to the season.

It was a superbly sunny Saturday, firm under foot with a refreshing breeze and all was set fair for entertaining running rugby and these two sides did not disappoint. The visitors dominated the early exchanges including their front row winning a penalty at the first scrum. In customary fashion the front row offender demonstrated his prelapsarian innocence with a look of amazement at having been penalised. With tenacious defence OR were denied. It was frustrating for Sutton that their first possession in the backs culminated in an interception near halfway and Harrison



Mitchell running in the opening try that was unconverted for a 5-0 Reigatian lead. After the restart Adam Bibby's reward for his excellent chase and tackle was a twisted ankle and being replaced by Lawrence Elliott for the remaining 70 minutes.

After a dozen minutes S&E were on the scoreboard. Gareth O'Brien initiated the counter before a powerful carry by Jordan Huie and a probing run by Pete Gordon. Then the backs were released and the crowd enjoyed the delicate tracery of O'Brien's weaving run to score under the posts. Freddy Bunting's conversion gave the hosts a slender 7-5 lead. In the next 20 minutes Sutton's hopes were hampered by discipline. Tom Baldwin willingly accepted a trio of penalties and the Black & Whites were reduced to 14 when Jordan Huie connected with an opponent in midair. The yellow card was perhaps not a condign punishment but this law is harsh if not essentially fair. With the visitors leading 14-7 Glanville and Whitaker rallied the hosts who were awarded a penalty of their own and Freddy Bunting reduced the lead to 14-10 to OR. Moments later a further 3-point opportunity was declined and Captain Bunting kicked to touch for a 5-metre lineout. Mount, no doubt, wearied by the moil of his scrummaging duties delighted at receiving the ball close to the line and dutifully scored. Despite the balmy temperatures Freddy Bunting was as cool as the underside of a cucumber and being as hard to rattle as two grapes in a wine glass he converted from the flank to take a 17-14 lead as the first half entered time added on.

As is frequently witnessed at every level of the game the restart is a vulnerable time for the team that has just scored. The Black & Whites secured the ball and seemed to have avoided the fatal error only to concede a penalty on their second sortie. Tom Baldwin made it four from four to level the score at 17-17. Neither side were content to just play out the first period with parity and audaciously tried to wrest the advantage from the other. Despite the endeavours of all concerned there was no addition to the score and the sides turned around level, 17-17. It had been a commendable effort by Sutton to shackle the Old Reigatian team and restrict them to one try and they now had the elements in their favour for the second period.

S&E were immediately under the cosh in the second half and were indebted to vital interventions by Jordan Huie, Alex Mount and Pete Gordon. But the Old Boys would not be denied and as it was Harrison Mitchell, who again opened the scoring, this time applying the coup de grâce from closer range. Ten minutes elapsed before the next score which was to be the first of a Tom Baldwin hat trick. Showing great determination he forced his way over in the corner despite considerable attention from the defenders and a dubious crowd dropped their remarks into the understanding air. Though unable to add the extras to his try Tom Baldwin had stretched the lead to 27-17. Sutton needed a swift reply and that was supplied by the livewire flanker Dan Jones with the Bunting boot bisecting the uprights the game was once more in the balance with OR leading S&E 27-24.

The game appeared to have taken on an entirely different complexion, and ended as a contest, with a sensational 5-minute burst from the men from Geoffrey Knight Fields. When 18-year-old William Henry Perkin invented by accident the synthetic purple dye, mauveine, in 1856 he became a multi-millionaire. It appeared that this purple patch of three tries in five minutes would be equally priceless to Old Reigatian. The hosts muffed the restart and Tom Baldwin dummied with numbers queuing up to score for his second. The inside centre completed his trio courtesy of some indecisive defence. Then replacement back William Parker joined the party with the pick of the tries courtesy of some delightful legerdemain. It was suddenly 48-24 with Tom Baldwin's personal tally 33 points. Whilst their opponent's back play was passing and running in excelsis Sutton had embraced the arms of Morpheus. The third rapid score would have encouraged the Rugby Lane faithful to get to the bar before the rush or view the remainder through the leper's squint. However, it was the catalyst for the transmogrification of the home XV's performance. With ten minutes on the clock the game that was threatening to become a rout became a spectacular comeback. Sutton to their credit did not panic with reckless play but valued their possession and waited for the openings. Jordan Huie brought the ball out of his 22 and it was recycled wide to Lawrence Elliott who stepped inside and broke to halfway before launching a speculative kick. The ball nestled under the posts and Arun Watkins won the race to touch it down. The simplest of conversions made it 48-31. Playing with pride and passion the Rugby Lane men laid siege on their opponents' line. Finally, the pressure told and Matt Whitaker scored and though the touchline conversion drifted wide it was 48-36 as the game entered time added on. Ewan McTaggart demonstrated how to secure the restart and put Sutton on the attack again. Freddy Bunting saw a gap and accelerated into the Reigatian half. The retreating defence of the Old Boys conceded a penalty. Without hesitation it was quickly taken and Matt Whitaker was dotting down under the posts. The rapidly taken conversion was successful and the scoreboard read 43-48. It was breathless and unbelievable rugby and the passionate crowd had witnessed the most extraordinary reversal of fortunes. The Black & Whites secured possession and Bunting and Watkins led the charge to halfway. This time the penalty led to a yellow card and the 14-man Old Reigatian team were forced into their 22 by Freddy Bunting's arrowing kick. Then another penalty and Mr Whinney issued another yellow card with a mortician's lofty detachment for the irksome job in hand as OR were set to complete the game with 13 on the pitch. The visitors faced a 5-metre lineout with no doubt a mixture of emotions from total disbelief to grim determination. To their eternal credit the visitors defended with heroic valour tackling with ferocity and denying space until they forced a turnover. The final whistle was greeted with jubilation and relief by Old



Reigatian whilst the Sutton faces were marked deeply with the hieroglyphics of pain.

First and foremost, this was a fabulous game of rugby that did great credit to all who were involved. The Old Reigatian backs attract a lot of praise, which is thoroughly deserved, but do not underestimate the front row triumvirate of Messrs Monk, Nestor and Collister who provided an excellent platform. No doubt the club archivist will be asked if Tom Baldwin broke the record for most points in a league game. For Sutton the remarkable revival should convince them that they have the capability to beat anyone in the league when they play their best rugby. Next week the 1st XV travel to Battersea Ironsides who themselves have enjoyed three close encounters of the rugby kind so far this campaign with two victories. The kick off will be 3pm at Burntwood Lane and it will be the first time Sutton have played a league fixture at this venue as last season the weather meant it was relocated to the Grasshoppers RFC's synthetic surface.

Sutton & Epsom

O'Brien, Watkins, Scott, Bibby, Huie, Bunting ©, Munford, Mount, Gordon, Boaden, Glanville, McTaggart, Rea, Jones & Whitaker.

Replacements: Hilton, Green & Elliott.

Old Reigatian

Woodford, Mitchell, Allen, Baldwin, Coyle, Holder, Skinner, Monk, Nestor, Collister, Jones, Franklin-Talbot, Brooks, Goldsmith & Travers.

Replacements: Lee, Courteney-Walker & Parker.

Photo: Robin Kennedy

Blue sky sees Black and Whites in the red

2 December 2024



Beckenham 29 Sutton & Epsom RFC 14. Saturday 14th September.

Sutton & Epsom arrived at Balmoral Lane as league leaders after a comprehensive Colfeians victory by 50-7. Beckenham had impressed with a 27-13 triumph of their own over Reeds Weybridge in their opener. As are the vagaries of availability there were six switches in the Sutton set up but no new arrivals. Messrs Elliott and Rea were elevated from the bench with Joe Lovatt starting at 9 to be joined by the experienced quintet of Munford, Whitaker, Mount, Mohr and Tame. Apologies for absence ranged from concussion to watching the T20 cricket finals at Edgbaston. Meanwhile, Beckenham's hat trick hero of Round One, Geordie Boyce, had endured an Australian Friday night to forget in Cardiff and was absent. After a keenly contested encounter Beckenham deserved the honours with a bonus point victory by 29-14.

Freddy Bunting kicked off on a beautifully sunny afternoon with a stiff breeze over his shoulder. After the initial sparring from both attacking units it was S&E that produced the first chance of the afternoon. A flowing break after a dozen minutes saw Sutton thwarted by foul play 5 metres from glory. The tapped penalty found its way to Matt Whitaker who stretched for the line but Mr Burchell adjudicated that the ball had not been touched down. Beckenham put themselves under further pressure by knocking on on their 22. This time it was Lawrence Elliott for Sutton who came agonisingly close to opening the scoring but marvellous defence prevented the ball being placed over the line. Moments later it was not to be third time lucky as a rampaging run by prop Alex Mount set up the perfect platform for a try but the opportunity was squandered. At the start of the second quarter Beckenham winger Gabriel Jordan dashed into the enemy half and threatened a stunning score but he was scythed down by a tremendous tackle by Lawrence Elliott. Having that taste of moderate success the hosts looked probable scorers on the half hour when Number 8 Andrew Knowles was hauled down with the line at his mercy. It was a very temporary stay of execution for Sutton. From the ensuing scrum the ball was transferred to the left where winger Gabriel Jordan had time and space to score. Despite the Lewis Bunton conversion failing on the wind Beckenham led 5-0.

Excellent pressure from the Black & Whites at the restart gave them an advantageous lineout on the host's 22. The scenario improved when Beckenham conceded a penalty that was kicked into the corner. Initially the Kent forwards splendidly drove back the Surrey pack. However, a secondary Sutton surge saw the visiting forwards advance towards the line. Then play was halted by the shrill blast of the whistle and the referee not only awarded Sutton & Epsom a penalty try but also he flourished a yellow card to captain Richard O'Keefe to reduce the host's, who now trailed 7-5, to 14 men. The Balmoral Avenue men made light of the numerical deficiency and soon

regained the lead. S&E failed to deal with a bobbling ball near their 22. From the scrum the home team struck down the flank with an arcing run followed by an inside pass to scrum half Craig Thomson who went through untouched to score. Lewis Bunton's successful strike concluded the first half with Beckenham leading 12-7 despite the wind and being a player down on the naughty step.

With the Beckenham coaching contingent imploring greater dynamism from their charges one contemplated that the collective noun for a group of coaches should be a 'Frustration' of coaches. Meanwhile in the visiting camp the message would have highlighted that the numerous visits to the opposition 22 had garnered only a solitary try whereas their opponents had been far more clinical with a couple of scores. The Balmoral Avenue faithful must have viewed their team as slight favourites as they had both the lead and the wind but they knew success would only come with an improved performance in the second half.

From the restart the hosts went in search of their next score. They upped the pace and ferocity and forced an error from the visitors when their scrum, on their line, came under considerable pressure. Beckenham looked to be mimicking S&E when they dropped the ball but rather than being fly-hacked to safety it fell into attacking hands. With commendable vision a long bouncing pass reached Matt Lovell in splendid isolation for him to score with ease. Lewis Bunton added to the growing lead with the conversion for 19-7. Moments later the Kent men looked likely to score a marvellous try as they swept down the pitch exhibiting superb support play but scrambling Sutton denied them a spectacular score.

S&E brought on their bench, Messrs Boaden, Hilton and Munford as they sought to hold out under their posts. The hosts conceded a free kick that was taken quickly by Matt Whitaker and in a flash he had relieved the siege and was crossing the halfway line. With the hour rapidly approaching Sutton were indebted to a wonderful solo effort from flanker Dan Jones who showed great pace and nimble footwork to score. Freddy Bunting nonchalantly added the extras to put his team back into the contest as they entered the final quarter trailing by 19-14. Elation became deflation from the restart. Failure to catch the kick led to the ball being deflected forward and giving away a hideous offside penalty as the approaching ball was as irresistible as an ice-cold lager on a sweltering summer afternoon. Lewis Bunton punished the error as he chipped over the penalty for a 22-14 lead that meant the visitors needed two scores to avoid defeat.

Lewis Bunton now sensibly used the wind to keep Sutton at arm's length by pinning them in their 22 with well-placed kicks. S&E were chasing the game and conceded a kickable penalty but Beckenham went in search of the bonus point try. Though their bravery went unrewarded as they lost the attacking lineout they had their reward in time added on. Gabriel Jordan scored his second try by demonstrating great strength in contact to break the tackle and then notable determination to run 30 metres straining every muscle to score with tacklers hanging onto his frame. Lewis Bunton bisected the uprights from the touchline for 29-14. There was time for one more frustrating visit to the host's line for the persevering visitors but the lammergeyers had been hovering over the Sutton carcass for a while and the final whistle put the visitors out of their misery on a frustrating afternoon for them.

Beckenham deservedly won this encounter outscoring S&E by 4-2 in the try count. From the outset their pack had the upper hand in the set scrum despite an early departure of the influential Rimarni Richards. The brothers Caddy impressed in the midfield whilst the educated boot of Lewis Bunton kept Sutton in their half in the second period once an 8-point lead had been established. Credit must also be given to the host's dogged defence in the first half that frustrated the visitors' attack that could not get into top gear. The clinical finishing by the home team was the ultimate difference between two evenly-matched outfits.

For Sutton & Epsom Dan Jones put in his best performance for the 1st XV and his stunning solo score was a just reward for a tireless effort in the best traditions of openside flankers. It is easy to take Matt Whitaker for granted as he approaches his 200th appearance but his uncanny habit of gathering the ball at eight from a retreating pack and still getting over the gain line is an invaluable commodity. Though the tempo and ferocity of the contest went up a notch or two in the second half it was the rather flat performance, in contrast to Week 1, in the first period that scuppered the Black & Whites in this match. In terms of possession and territory they should have led at the interval but instead turned around with a 5-point deficit which proved to be a significant obstacle to success.

The Black and Whites return to Rugby Lane to take up the challenge of Old Reigatian who were most impressive 38-21 winners in the corresponding fixture last season. They will hope, no doubt, to recapture the sparkling form from the opening fixture and return to winning ways.
Sutton & Epsom

Elliott, Watkins, Scott, Bibby, Mohr, Bunting ©, Lovatt, Mount, Gordon, Gibson, Tame, McTaggart, Rea, Jones & Whitaker.

Replacements: Boaden, Hilton, & Munford.

Beckenham

Kennedy, Lovell, J. Caddy, L. Caddy, Jordan, Bunton, Thomson, Baker, Willden, Richards, Latouche, Moran, Keefe ©, Stapleton & Knowles.

Replacements: Hatfield, Bernard-Moore & Feldhaus-Davies.



Sutton and Epsom Rugby off to a flying-start

2 December 2024



Sutton & Epsom RFC opened their 2024-25 league account against Old Colfeians, on Saturday 7th September, over whom they had completed an impressive double last season. There were nine changes in personnel from the last time the Black & Whites ran out at Rugby Lane in the concluding fixture against Reeds Weybridge. Among the multiple changes were six debutants: Arun Watkins on the wing; Finlay Scott and Adam Bibby in the centres; Pete Gordon at hooker; and Callum Hilton and Josh Rea ready to come off the bench. It very much had the feel of a new beginning for the Surrey outfit, with not a single player in the same position as in the curtain-raiser from last season. When the final whistle blew, the new-look XV had surpassed all expectations with a thrilling 50-7 victory.

Captain Bunting kicked off the campaign, and after ten minutes it was the hosts who opened the scoring. Pouncing on a clearance that failed to make touch, Sutton advanced into the opposition 22. Debutant hooker Pete Gordon exploited the blindside to race home untouched. Freddy Bunting added the extras for a 7-0 lead. As S&E dominated the early exchanges, the visitors' task became harder when winger Estefan Ellis was awarded a yellow card for a high tackle. The visitors, now a man down, were swiftly punished. Bunting kicked into the corner, and from the platform of the attacking lineout, Rob Hegarty forced his way over from short yardage. The conversion failed, but Sutton & Epsom held a useful 12-0 lead at the end of the first quarter.

The Rugby Lane team pressed hard to maximise their numerical advantage, gathering the restart and running the ball back with interest. Soon, winger Jordan Huie was threatening to add another score. The pack rumbled remorselessly forward before the ball was spun out to Gareth O'Brien, who jinked, stepped, and stretched out to touch down for a try. Freddy Bunting slotted over the kick for 19-0. The visitors were restored to their full complement, but the card had cost them 12 points. Old Colfeians struggled to gain a foothold in the contest, as errors and penalties frustrated their rhythm and gifted territory to the eager hosts. As the interval approached, S&E had another 5-metre lineout. Once again, the forwards controlled the ball and pressured the line before a timely release to the backs offered Gareth O'Brien the opportunity to cross the whitewash again. Freddy Bunting celebrated the bonus point score with another conversion, making it 26-0.

Sutton made personnel changes as debutants Rea and Hilton replaced Jones and Hilton. In the generous time allowed for stoppages, Colfeians started to find their feet and pressed for a morale-boosting score before the break. However, the Black & Whites' resolute defence neutralised the attacks, and the sides turned around with the hosts enjoying an impressive 26-0 lead. It was clear that the men from Horn Park would need an early score in the second period to initiate a comeback and try to sow the seeds of doubt in the confident Sutton squad.

Any hope for the visiting supporters of an early score was denied by a combination of Sutton's intensity in defence and Colfeians' mounting error count. S&E replaced Pete Gordon with Dan Jones as Lawrence Elliott came off the bench to swap with Adam Bibby. As the final quarter approached, it was Sutton & Epsom who recorded try number five. Arun Watkins reacted fastest to a loose ball and burst through a gap to score his first try for the home team. Freddy Bunting made it four from five as the lead stretched to 33-0.

With the score and the clock against them, the Colfeians' mountainous task was approaching Everest-like proportions. However, five minutes later, a flicker of light emerged from the abyss as Captain Andy O'Malley, carrying a couple of Sutton tacklers on his back, scored. Ryan Napper provided the conversion, making it 33-7. Sutton's fatalists were soon relieved when, minutes later, a familiar electrifying break by Dan Jones gifted Freddy Bunting a try. However, to the surprise of many, the usually reliable kicker saw his effort drift wide, leaving the score at 38-7.

Unfortunately, scrum-half Laurence Wise was forced to depart with a shoulder injury after a sterling performance as the game entered the period that Mr Ben Stewart's watch deemed necessary. There was still plenty of time for the Rugby Lane crowd to enjoy a brace of tries from debutant centre Finlay Scott. The first, an unconverted effort, followed two breaks, and Scott was on hand as the beneficiary. The second came after Colfeians' scrambling defence conceded a penalty try and collected a yellow card. A precise cross-field kick opened up the defence for the final try. Normal service was resumed as Freddy Bunting bisected the uprights for a 50-7 win.

There was an air of almost uncomfortable optimism before the kick-off at Rugby Lane, as pre-season had gone well, and there was evident intensity in defence and improved continuity between the forwards and backs. Lest one forget, S&E had conceded an uncomfortable 598 points last league campaign, and as the legendary coach of the University of Alabama football team, Bear Bryant, wisely stated: "Offence wins games... defence wins championships." However, few would have expected Sutton to break two all-time league records. Not only did they eclipse their previous points total of 49 against Bedford Athletic in 2018 by scoring 50, but they also surpassed the 31-point winning margin of their 2005 45-14 thrashing

of Gosport & Fareham. What was most impressive was that the Black & Whites had integrated numerous new combinations at half-back and in the centres, with a debutant hooker in Pete Gordon. For a delighted coaching staff, this performance must bode well for the rest of the season. For the unfortunate Old Colfeians, it was one of those days where things simply did not go right. The first game of the season should never be a barometer for the whole fixture list, as numerous hurdles, from weddings to injuries, can distort the true picture.

The campaign will continue next weekend, Saturday 14th September, with a trip to Balmoral Avenue, where Sutton enjoyed one of their finest games of the last campaign, defeating the then-league-leaders Beckenham 26-22 on an afternoon notable for extraordinary winds.

Sutton & Epsom: O'Brien, Watkins, Scott, Bibby, Huie, Bunting ©, Wise, Boaden, Gordon, Gibson, Glanville, McTaggart, Pulvirenti, Jones & Hegarty.
Replacements: Hilton, Rea & Elliott.

Old Colfeians: Edwards, Chapman, Sleep, Griffiths, Ellis, Napper, Spaczil, Rameaux, Holland-Oliver, Whicello, O'Malley ©, T. Walker, M. Walker, Carter & Gray.
Replacements: Seva, Cunningham & Ramdhan.

Photo credit: Robin Kennedy

London Calling Time with a Sutton & Epsom Win

2 December 2024



Sutton & Epsom RFC 12 Reeds Weybridge 10. Saturday 6th April.

As is the format of league rugby the fixtures conclude by playing the opposition first encountered on the opening day of the campaign. On that September afternoon bathed in glorious sunshine but disrupted by Rugby World Cup absentees, of the carousing rather than playing variety, Reeds Weybridge gained a 27-12 success. With both teams secure in the knowledge that they had retained their Regional 2 South East status for next time one might have expected a high-scoring denouement to the campaign. In the end the teams created a Sutton & Epsom league record as the Black & Whites edged the contest 12-10 so recording the lowest aggregate ever for the last game of the season undercutting the 1995 classic when S&E won 13-11 at Ealing.

It was a red-letter day for George London as the veteran, but not balding, back row made his 200th league appearance for the 1st XV transforming the 'Fab Four' into the 'Famous Five' of players to have reached that landmark. The match was played with the handicap, or advantage, of a howling wind arrowing towards the corner flag at the clubhouse end. Reeds Weybridge kicked off with the elements against them. At once the significance of the gale was demonstrated as Tom Lennard cleared from his 22 to the opposition 22. If that was not harsh enough it was a 50/22 and Sutton were awarded the lineout.

This initiated a ten-minute siege of the Reeds line. The throw in was secured, the forwards advanced and a penalty was indicated as a speculative ball descended from the heavens onto the wings. The defenders saved the day but returned for more punishment. The penalty was kicked to the corner, McTaggart rose skywards to gather and initiate the second assault. Three carries and a penalty and the same dose of medicine was repeated. This time the referee issued a yellow card and Sutton & Epsom pressed on against 14. A tap and go, a roar from the crowd but no try and it went wide and more optimistic overtures as Ghumra dived for the corner. Back for another penalty and the Rugby Lane crowd were beseeching Sir to indicate a try but Hegarty was held up. Reeds relief and a drop out under the posts to restart play. The Black & Whites countered with zeal and finally opened their account. Perhaps Mr Richardson had a sense of occasion as the try-scorer was George London. The conversion was added but with another dramatic twist as Freddy Bunting was allowed a second bite at the cherry and the hosts led 7-0.

The opening score was not the sign of the floodgates opening but saw the visitors



getting a foothold in the game. It was obvious that Reeds were looking to play at a high tempo and get the ball to their dangerous back division. Penalties were played quickly and the RW pack was gaining the ascendancy at the scrummage. On the half hour they were rewarded with an outstanding try. The combination of superb line of running by Pete Cole and a perfectly timed pass saw winger Matt Stevenson run in under the posts with four colleagues in congratulatory support. Fullback Pete Cole added the extras to level the scores at 7-7. Moments later it took two tremendous tackles within a minute by Josh Pulvirenti to snuff out a potential break from halfway. Despite the conditions it was Reeds who were finishing the first half the stronger with centre Josh Clark to the fore using intelligent chips and grubbers to keep Sutton on the back foot. The first period ended with no further addition to the scoreboard. Reeds Weybridge had achieved the notable success of being on level terms despite playing against a very strong wind.

The start of the second period was a mirror of the first which was hardly surprising as there was no easing up from the elements. The men from Whiteley Village dominated territory and possession but they discovered, as had their Sutton counterparts, that those final yards were the hardest. Marcus Clark on the wing came closest to breaking the deadlock but the S&E defensive line stood strong whether it was Kyren Ghumra on the wing or the tireless pack. Increasingly the flow of the game was disrupted by infringements on the deck that created a stalemate that prevented the Reeds backs demonstrating their quality and gave the Sutton & Epsom defence added confidence in what was a surprisingly uneventful third quarter.

The final twenty minutes signalled the start of increased excitement as Matt Stevenson's quickly taken penalty appeared to have caught Sutton & Epsom napping. However, a fabulous cover tackle by Captain Bunting was a most timely intervention that was improved when S&E were awarded a relieving penalty. Soon it was advantage Sutton & Epsom with Freddie Bunting making a surging break to the 22 to link with centre partner Ellis Rudder that concluded with a Sutton penalty. The resulting 5-metre attacking lineout drifted on the wind with a not straight verdict giving the visitors an escape route. Perhaps it was frustration but the visitors ignored the helpful conditions to run the ball from their own line. The yards gained were immediately lost to a penalty and petulance that saw them marched back 10 metres. Ironically Reeds next opportunity came as Sutton lost the ball in the opposition 22 and it was fly-hacked clear. Suddenly the pitch opened up with RW players streaming ominously forward but Austin Bell did wonderfully to secure the loose ball to avert disaster on halfway.

With the game in the balance and in time added on Reeds were within touching distance of glory but had the consolation of a penalty. It was an easy decision for captain Herbie Finn to opt for the kick at goal as fullback Pete Cole effortlessly put the visitors 10-7 up. One could imagine Captain Finn imploring his team to secure the restart and send it deep into Sutton territory and on no account concede a penalty. With the billowing breeze making the restart more of a lottery than it might have been the Black & Whites were given the lifeline of a penalty. It was advanced to the corner and another penalty followed the lineout. Sutton went for route one as tempers boiled over before the final play of the season. The forwards provide a mass of steaming humanity on the try-line and Rob Hegarty squeezed over to win the game for Sutton & Epsom. It was left for George London to attempt the touchline conversion and despite a passable impression of All Black legend Don Clarke it fell short. The final whistle blew and Sutton & Epsom had snatched victory by 12-10. The supporters retired to the clubhouse and for those who live in a tinkerless world they ruminated on what might have been in 2023-4. The Sutton & Epsom victory was synonymous with the man of the hour, George London, it was full of determination, a never say die attitude and a will to win in adversity that saw Sutton over the line. Reeds had the edge in the scrummage and the more threatening back division. However, the powerful wind did not bring the anticipated cascade of points as both XVs demonstrated determined defence and it was the Black & Whites who gained the points by virtue of winning the try battle by 2-1 but only at the eleventh hour with Brunnhilde on her final chorus.

Sutton & Epsom

O'Brien, Findlay, Rudder, Bunting ©, Ghumra, Lennard, Munford, Boaden, Farrell, Gibson, Glanville, McTaggart, London, Pulvirenti & Hegarty.

Replacements: Al Khaldi, Jones & Bell.

Reeds Weybridge

Cole, Stevenson, J. Clark, Maddock, Brown, Jesty, Palmer, L. Day, R. Day, Ring, Finn ©, Wasko, G. Corner, Collyer, A. Corner.

Replacements: Rawding, Relfe & M. Clark.

Image courtesy Robin Kennedy

Sutton and Epsom leapfrog Old Colfeians in the end

2 December 2024



Old Colfeians 22 - Sutton and Epsom RFC 31. Saturday 23rd March.

In bygone years this was a regular league fixture and Saturday bore witness to the sixteenth such encounter between the clubs. Old Colfeians is a club to be mentioned in whispered tones whilst in the company of James Clark's title-winners of 2006-07. That Black and White celebrated side saw their perfect record spoiled on the club's last venture to Horn Park in January 2007. The 2023-24 vintage may not have won this league but they headed home with a 31-22 victory and replaced the hosts in eighth place in the league table.

The revolving door of selection meant that only Messrs Lennard and Bunting were in the same shirts in a reshuffled Sutton back division following the culling of Cobham. For the pack it was a minor disruption that saw Tom Boaden elevated from the bench in the absence of Alex Mount. Sutton played with the significant advantage of the elements in the first period as a strong wind tore down the pitch. Despite this handicap Colfeians started on the front foot. A sublime moment of legerdemain by Tom Chapman put Ollie Burkett into space and the full back was only denied by an eleventh hour cover tackle by Tom Lennard. The wind hampered the Sutton lineout and led to an OCs scrum. The set piece wheeled and the alert home Number 9 Jed Wylie wriggled free to score from 5 metres out. Chris Harris added the conversion for a most valuable 7-0 lead in less than advantageous conditions.

Sutton replied instantly as the Horn Park XV struggled to deal with the restart gifting the visitors with a prime attacking penalty position 5 metres from their line. The initial surge from the set play failed to secure the score but a couple of phases later Josh Pulvirenti forced his way over in the corner. The touchline conversion was blown wide and the Black and Whites trailed 5-7. Moments later a counter by Kyren Ghumra ended in an SandE penalty that was drilled into the corner by Freddy Bunting. From the 5-metre lineout the Sutton pack went through multiple phases inching not only closer to the try line but also the uprights. Robust Colfeians' defence was finally ended by Mr Tobias Whinney awarding Sutton another 5-metre penalty. Once more the attacking tapped option was taken rather than a kick at the posts.

Again the forwards took control and ushered hooker Chris Farrell over the line. Normal service resumed for the Bunting boot and the visitors led 12-7 after a dozen minutes.

From the restart Sutton's counter was penalised for crossing and it was Colfeians turn to put the ball in the corner and attack from a 5-metre lineout. The Black and White line held but infringed. Playing the advantage a Colfeians deft chip just sailed over the head of Chris Harris but the winger punished SandE by adding the three points when play was brought back for the penalty. OCs trailed 10-12 in a game of fluctuating fortunes in the first quarter.

Approaching the half hour Sutton secured their third try. With their best passage of play of the match so far the backs and forwards combined through several phases before Ellis Rudder was stopped deep in the 22 but the cover infringed on the deck. On this occasion it was Callum Gibson who was the beneficiary with a try from the forward effort from the tapped penalty. Freddy Bunting's touchline conversion was even more impressive as he made it at the third attempt having aborted his first two approaches as the wind blew the ball off the tee. Sutton had extended their advantage to lead 19-10.

The visitors were soon threatening another score. A wonderful break by Tom Lennard from his own half released fullback Ciaran Mohr who stepped inside the cover, took the last tackle before passing to Alfie Baker but the ball was not gathered and a wonderful score was denied. In addition Ciaran Mohr injured his ankle and was replaced by Austin Bell. A rampant Sutton did not dwell on this missed opportunity and shortly afterwards had their bonus point try. The impressive Josh Pulvirenti made a break and marauded into the 22 and passed to Angus Findlay who was rewarded for his excellent support play with the try. Bunting moved to the ball with his familiar constabulary stroll and converted with a laconic air for 26-10. Ten minutes later and SandE added a fifth try from a precise lineout routine that saw Rob Hegarty burst through a gap to score. Though the conversion failed Sutton had a healthy 31-10 lead.

With the first half near completion SandE ran the ball from their 22 from the restart looking to maximise their advantage from the windy conditions. They were brought back for a forward pass and there began a lengthy final play. It was a rugby version of 'Groundhog Day'. The teams scrummaged, the hosts were awarded a penalty, the visitors prevented a score and the referee brought them back for the penalty and Colfeians chose to scrummage again.

Finally, after 52 minutes in the first period, and a yellow card for Sutton's Dan Jones, winger Tom Chapman squeezed in at the corner. A very challenging conversion fell short and the first half ended with the Black and Whites 31-15 ahead.

The interval had comical overtones as Sutton stayed out on the pitch whilst their hosts enjoyed the warmth of their dressing room. With a sable sky, a hailstorm swept the pitch and Sutton players took shelter behind their bulkier colleagues. Perhaps it was the reward of the Gods for braving the weather as the game restarted in sunshine and becalmed as cruelly the Colfeians were to be denied the strong wind enjoyed by Sutton. The second half was a curious affair. With excellent tactical acumen and pragmatism the numerically inferior visitors spent their punishment time in the opposition 22. This benevolent occupation was then extended to practically the entire second half. Old Colfeians adopted the mantle of Horatio and Rorke's Drift in heroic defence whilst Sutton became a hybrid of Sisyphus and Tantalus.

With the game approaching full time Old Colfeians finally made it into the Sutton and Epsom half and won a penalty. The ball was drilled into the corner for a 5-metre lineout. The throw was secured and the mountainous figure of captain Andy O'Malley powered over to score. Chris Harris then reduced the arrears to 22-31 and the crowd awoke from their slumber at the prospect of a thrilling climax. After their prolonged territorial dominance Sutton's character was now put to the test as an element of doubt over the outcome entered into the equation. If the first period was inordinately lengthy the second period was unbelievably time consuming as it racked up 57 minutes. There were several stoppages with the physios in attendance but once again it was last play that endured. Sutton were again reduced to 14 when Rob Hegarty departed following a high tackle but Colfeians could not force another score to garner any points. The game ended with the hosts defending and frustrating SandE who failed to add to their score in the second period. The match finally concluded with the Black and Whites victorious by 31-22.

There may be aficionados who love nothing more than a reset scrum and a catalogue of infringements as frequent stoppages deny free-flowing rugby as with this second half. However, that seems as likely as someone preferring the brutalist architecture of a housing estate in Stalinist Russia to the Taj Mahal. It was a shame as a sizeable crowd had gathered for Past Players' Day adding greatly to the occasion and superlative bonhomie in the clubhouse after the game. Sutton were the deserved winners but Old Colfeians failed to exploit their superiority at the scrummage as discipline and errors undermined their performance. In the lineout and the loose the SandE pack played with great control.

Angus Findlay, starting for the first time in his preferred Number 9 shirt, gave an assured performance releasing the back division that showed moments of fluency and quality. The Black and Whites failure to convert pressure into points in the second half was more down to the courageous Colfeian defence than the inadequacies of the Sutton attack.

The Easter weekend offers a rest for the teams before the league season concludes on Saturday 6th April. Old Colfeians will be taking a trip to relegated Cobham and have the prospect of ending the campaign with a thumping victory. Meanwhile at Rugby Lane Sutton and Epsom will host Reeds Weybridge aiming to make amends for a 27-12 loss on the opening day of the season.

Sutton and Epsom

Mohr, Baker, Rudder, Bunting ©, Ghumra, Lennard, Findlay, Boaden, Farrell, Gibson, Glanville, McTaggart, Jones, Pulvirenti and Hegarty.

Replacements: Al Khaldi, Tame and Bell.

Old Colfeians:

Burkett, Harris, Hepden, Jones, Chapman, Smith, Wylie, Whichello, Newins, Rameaux, O'Malley ©, Cunningham, Walker, Carter and Smith.

Replacements: Orubo, Greatorex-Sanderson and Nagel.

Sutton and Epsom blow the Cobwebs away

2 December 2024



Sutton & Epsom RFC 49 Cobham 13. Saturday 16th March.

Having lost to the basement boys of London Cornish, the Exiles gaining their first win on the road for over a year, Sutton and Epsom supporters arrived at Rugby Lane with a sense of mild trepidation. Could the proverbial lightning revisit with the arrival of eleventh-placed Cobham who had lost their last eleven matches. For those fearing that the wheels had come off the Black & White charabanc it appears, on Saturday's evidence, to have passed its MOT and was in perfect working order as the team ran in a magnificent seven tries for an emphatic 49-13 triumph. The victory mathematically secured Sutton & Epsom's position in Level 6.

Freddy Bunting kicked off into the breeze and initiated a period of high tempo attacking rugby that saw his team living in the Cobham 22 for the majority of the opening 15 minutes. The visitors defended impressively none more so than when from a tapped 5-metre penalty Josh Glanville was held up over the line by a superb tackle. Having had all of the game Sutton & Epsom conceded the first points when, on their first sortie into the S&E half, Jonathan Holmes kicked a penalty for a 3-0 lead. A few minutes later and the Black & Whites received a second dose of unpalatable medicine as Holmes made it 6-0.

It was at this stage the classic debate of whether to kick for points or seek greater rewards was raging amongst the crowd. The hosts approach was to turn down every kick at goal and seek the higher tariff score. In the course of the first period they were to reject many kicks with several in front of the uprights. Finally on the half hour their bravery was rewarded. The ball went wide and Lawrence Elliott, running a superb line, broke through and using all of his strength powered over. Freddy Bunting splendidly bisected the uprights for a 7-6 lead. Cobham's attempt to regain the lead with a third penalty failed as the first period neared its conclusion.

Approaching time added on Cobham were reduced to 14 when Mr Priddle issued a yellow card to blindside Max Hales who departed as a result of the cumulative effect of infringements in the 22. Sutton & Epsom went for the tap penalty and it was the redoubtable Alex Mount who stretched out to secure the try. Freddy Bunting added the simple conversion for a 14-6 lead. The restart is often the most dangerous moment and the Black & Whites conceded a penalty but the visitors attempts to secure a platform to attack the Sutton line faltered and the referee blew for half-time. S&E had a vital 14-6 lead with a man advantage to take into the second period with the wind behind them.

The Rugby Lane team pressed hard to extend their lead in the opening exchanges of the second half attempting to benefit from their numerical and meteorological advantages. The Bunting boot put his team in the 22. Cobham survived for ten minutes before hooker Chris Farrell collected his sixth try of the campaign. Captain Bunting made it three out of three as Sutton led 21-6. The visitors then showed the fighting spirit one would expect from a team teetering on the brink of relegation. Awarded a penalty in the 22 they tapped and went. Sutton & Epsom had failed to retreat and they repeated the option with captain and scrum-half Ryan Saunders scoring. Jonathan Holmes converted to put Cobham back in the hunt trailing 13-21.

Barely had the inspiring words of encouragement of a comeback drifted on the wind and Cobham were standing behind their posts awaiting another Sutton & Epsom conversion. From the restart Dan Jones gathered the ball from a ruck outside the visitors' 22 and exploited a gap to streak away for the try. With the extras S&E led 28-13 and had secured their try bonus point. That score thoroughly demoralised the men from the Memorial Ground as it inspired the Rugby Lane XV. The game entered the final quarter and the hosts provided their faithful fans with their most exhilarating rugby seen at home this season.

Sensible tactical kicking by half-backs Munford and Lennard kept the hosts on the attack. A wonderful break from Tom Lennard at 10 looked certain to lead to a try but he was felled by a tap tackle close to glory. The crowd did not have to wait long for try Number 5. The ball went to the opposite flank and a training ground routine was executed to perfection from a lineout. The ball was secured, the line-break made and the overlap exploited as Ciaran Mohr strolled in at the corner. Freddy Bunting made light of the testing conversion for 35-13.

Try number six again owed its success to repetition on cold winter nights. A 5-metre lineout was secured and the pack advanced forward to provide Rob Hegarty with his eighth try of the season. It was a fitting reward for the quality of the lineout from the triumvirate of McTaggart, Pulvirenti and Glanville who had given Sutton & Epsom an excellent platform all afternoon. With a degree of inevitability Freddy Bunting converted and it was 42-13. For the first time this season at Rugby Lane the home crowd could enjoy a relaxing conclusion to a match. Previous contests might have been thrilling for the neutral observer but had provided far too much anxiety. Cobham attempted to end on a high point and looked destined to secure an otiose try. However a wayward pass bounced into the grateful hands of Angus Findlay who sped away from his own 22 for his first 1st XV league try. Freddy Bunting completed a perfect afternoon with the boot and the match concluded with Sutton & Epsom enjoying a resounding 49-13 win.



Apart from the security of success it was a red-letter day for two of the Sutton and Epsom side. Steve Munford in playing his 215th league match for the club surpassed Steve Warnham's total and lies second to the 251-game Sam Frost. Meanwhile, with his first successful kick of the afternoon, Freddy Bunting broke Sam Hurley's 2015-6 record of 208 points in a league season. It was a redemptive afternoon for the skipper after he had appeared to have supped at the river Lethe on his last outing. Sutton & Epsom may be breathing easier but carnivorous creatures circle the Cobham carrion as descent into the abyss of Level 7 seems probable after Gravesend's victory over Beckenham. With the 'Jersey Reprieve' there will be the incongruous site of Cobham supporters googling the results of Chosen Hill FP, Kirkby Lonsdale and Old Crossleyans in the weeks to come. Next Saturday S&E enjoy their last away day of the campaign with a first visit to Horn Park since January 2007 to take on Old Colfeians who they defeated 21-17 in December.

Sutton & Epsom

O'Brien, Huie, Elliott, Bunting ©, Findlay, Lennard, Munford, Mount, Farrell, Gibson, Glanville, McTaggart, Jones, Pulvirenti & Hegarty.

Replacements: Boaden, Tame & Mohr.

Cobham

Penfold, Springett, Boswell, Burnett, Yorke, Holmes, Saunders ©, Aujla, Muirhead, Bliss, Westgarth-Taylor, Farmer, Hales, Blackwood & Porter.

Replacements: Nunn, Keefe & O'Connor.

Image courtesy Robin Kennedy

Cornish Collect Crucial Win on Heartbreak Hill

2 December 2024



Sutton & Epsom 22 - London Cornish RFC 31 . Saturday 2nd March.

The fixture at the Richard Evans Memorial Playing Fields in November was notable for the debut of Willem Ratu who scored a hat trick that helped Sutton & Epsom to a healthy 53-24 triumph. In the absence of the injured Taranaki Terror all those in the Cornish camp were hoping that this would create a more level playing field as they continued their efforts to climb out of the relegation abyss and get some traction from their victory over fellow strugglers Cobham in the last round of fixtures. The Exiles made it two in a row as they gave their supporters another injection of belief with a priceless bonus point win by 31-22 over Sutton.

The downpours in the week and more torrential rain led to a change in location for this fixture. The teams relocated from the serene surroundings of Rugby Lane to the windswept wastelands of Priest Hill. The hosts kicked off the match playing against the gusting wind and the significant slope. At this stage of the campaign the coaches are unlikely to be paid the ultimate divine compliment of selecting their full complement but London Cornish were delighted to field their first choice back three who were to be significant contributors. At once the visitors had the chance to open the scoring with a penalty. Michael Edworthy's effort was blown off course and it remained 0-0. Their dismay was short-lived, from the 22 drop out they secured possession and spread it wide. Left wing Matt Hakes powerful touchline run was assisted by some weak tackling as his determination saw him touch down in the corner. The challenging conversion drifted wide as the Exiles led 5-0 within five minutes.

London Cornish sought to exploit the conditions with thoughtful kicking to keep Sutton & Epsom on the defensive and penned in their 22. In their efforts to escape the hosts conceded another penalty in front of the posts. The wind again came to Sutton's rescue as it was becoming increasingly evident that place-kicking was going to be an arduous task. On the quarter hour S&E made their first significant contribution to proceedings. Running the ball with a penalty advantage they knocked on with an overlap in the 22. They had a second chance as they kicked the penalty to the corner but the Cornish won the line out. They were gifted a third chance as the ball was touched down in goal for a Sutton scrum. It was third time extremely unlucky as they sauntered blind for a definite score only to be halted by the whistle as they had offended at the scrummage. The Sutton profligacy was instantly punished. The ball was chipped over the Black & White defence in their 22. Covering fullback Tom Lennard lost his footing and was enveloped by the Cornish who drove him over the line. From the 5-metre scrum the visitors shunted the Sutton pack

into reverse and Number 8 Conor Pearce applied the finishing touch and 10-0 to the Exiles. Five minutes later there was a repeat performance. The kick into space saw the retreating Kyren Ghumra struggling to gather the ball and it was only a last gasp dive that prevented a try. Another 5-metre scrum to the visitors but this time near the posts and the Sutton pack held the drive. Variety is the spice of life and Ciaran Johnston released his backs and centre Peter Brogden waltz in untouched. Simon Edworthy, grateful for a simpler conversion, added the extras for 17-0 after thirty minutes.

A possible lifeline dangled tantalisingly before Sutton eyes as Mr Simon Matthews was left prostrate on the pitch. After treatment from the physios the referee gingerly returned to the vertical and was able to continue with the game. As much as the visitors were intelligently exploiting the elements the hosts were being naïve as they kicked poorly to the back three and attempted long passes on the wind. With the interval approaching London Cornish secured a bonus point with their fourth try of the afternoon. Fly-half Michael Edworthy drifted across creating space for inside centre Peter Brogden who presented his centre partner, captain George Kimmins, with an easy run in under the posts. The conversion made it 24-0 to the visitors.

In the dying moments of the first half London Cornish had a wonderful opportunity to add a fifth try but scrambling defence denied them as they dropped the ball with the line at their mercy. The referee ended the half with the Exiles 24-0 up. All concerned were wondering just how many points the slope and wind were worth. Would the missed kicks prove to be costly and could Sutton & Epsom transform a lamentable first period performance into a rousing comeback? Conditions temporarily deteriorated at the start of the second half as teeming rain was added to the difficulties to be endured by the players. It was essential for the Black & Whites to score early. Within five minutes Matt Whitaker was driving his way over the line. Mr Matthews ruled that he had been held up over the line. The S&E disappointment was helped by the fact that London Cornish were reduced to 14 as Number 8 Conor Pearce was carded for a high tackle. The hosts took advantage of their numerical superiority and drove the Cornish pack off their own ball and Matt Whitaker scored. Freddy Bunting added an impressive conversion from the flank and S&E were up and running at 7-24. Mercifully the rain abated and moments later ceased. Sutton had now emptied their bench with Messrs Mount, Pulvirenti and Rudder being replaced by the triumvirate of Boaden, Jones and Elliott as they looked to reinvigorate their efforts.

At the end of the third quarter Sutton were in prime position to reduce the deficit but an errant throw to the 5-metre lineout gifted Cornish a relieving scrum. It was the visitors' turn to have their clearance returned with meaning. Tom Lennard countered and combined with Ghumra and Elliott to get to the corner. Sterling cover by Robert Mackay denied the score but the home team pressed on. White line fever descended on the Black & White ranks and they were grateful to be awarded a penalty. Finally, the pack forced its way over and Callum Gibson emerged as the scorer. It was a fine reward for the prop on an afternoon when he had carried tirelessly and with great effect. The kick from the extremities missed as Sutton trailed 12-24.

With the match entering the final 10 minutes the crucial moment came. London Cornish had made a rare visit to the Sutton 22. The hosts looked to counter and exploit a generous blindside. Cornish winger Matt Hakes gambled and won the lottery as he intercepted and strolled in for the fifth try. Simon Edworthy bisected the uprights and suddenly the gap that had so recently appeared bridgeable now seemed to be a gaping chasm as London Cornish led 31-12. Though visibly deflated by the score it was not long before the Rugby Lane men roused themselves for a grandstand finish. Firstly, Kyren Ghumra scored in the corner and anxious visitors asked Sir how long remained. 31-17 with two minutes of regulation time to play. The drama intensified as Rob Hegarty scored Sutton's fourth try in time added on. Perhaps it was the lack of a scoreboard at Priest Hill but the hosts' arithmetic let them down. With the score 22-31 and a conversion under the posts to come a successful kick would have secured a second bonus point. However, a rapidly taken drop kick missed. But the Gods seemed to be favouring Sutton as they were awarded a penalty on the final play of the game. Captain Bunting lined up his kick but it drifted agonisingly wide.

The 31-22 win provided London Cornish with a significant boost in their bid for survival. They will be hoping that Sutton can do them a favour by beating relegation rivals Cobham on 16 th March when the campaign resumes. The Exiles deservedly won the match, they exploited the first half advantage superbly and despite some anxious moments at the death it would have been harsh if they had been denied a vital victory. For Sutton & Epsom there were far too many errors that undermined their performance and it was only in the late rally that they demonstrated their true worth. With three matches left for the Black & Whites they still have work to do to retain their status in Level 6 and they will be hoping that the extremes of the weather will not see them relocated to Priest Hill in their two remaining home matches.

Sutton & Epsom

Lennard, Findlay, Rudder, Bunting ©, Ghumra, Bennion, Munford, Mount, Farrell, Gibson, Glanville, McTaggart, Pulvirenti, Hegarty & Whitaker.

Replacements: Boaden, Jones & Elliott.

London Cornish

Mackay, Hakes, Kimmins ©, Brogden, Bromage, Edworthy, Johnston, Pellow, Cruz, Theobald, Carr,



McEwen, Fink, Webb, & Pearce.

Replacements: New, Sorgo-Mirosevic & Phoenix.

Photo credit: Robin Kennedy

Outwitted by Sidcup's set pieces

2 December 2024



Sidcup 45 Sutton & Epsom RFC 22. Saturday 17th February.

Sutton & Epsom RFC first played at Crescent Farm in February 1898 and it is a delight to record that modern times have not hindered this historic rivalry as the clubs met for the 21st time in the league era on Saturday afternoon. Earlier in the campaign the teams met at Rugby Lane with both clubs apologetically at the bottom of the table with a solitary success each. Sutton & Epsom came from behind to take the honours on that day. Since that November day the season has improved considerably for both clubs with the hosts arriving on the back of five straight wins. Sidcup's successful streak continued as they comprehensively and deservedly defeated S&E 45-22.

Sutton & Epsom were forced into four changes from the side that beat Gravesend with the back division incurring most of the disruption with three absentees but with the advantage of hindsight the loss of the Black & Whites' hooker probably had greater significance on the events that were to unfold. Captain Bunting started proceedings as the sides sparred in search of any early defensive frailties. The teams recycled the ball quickly, defences closed rapidly and kickers looked for open spaces and the status quo was maintained. A looping run from Sutton 10 Tom Lennard initiated the first genuine chance in the 22 but solid defensive tackling saw the ball go forward a few phases later. In contrast from a scrum on halfway Sidcup scored from their first sortie. The ball went wide and an overlap was created on the flank and Louis Keeley finished with aplomb despite a valiant effort from the diving Matt Symonds. The conversion fell short but the hosts led 5-0.

Sutton & Epsom's next chance to score was manufactured by a magnificent touchline clearance from Gareth O'Brien, being a yard or two from touch he magically threaded the ball 50 metres down the line. Though denied a stunning 50/22 the slavering chasers forced a penalty and Freddy Bunting happily accepted the points on offer for S&E to trail 3-5. As ever restarts are crucial and scrappy play saw the Black & Whites suddenly 5 metres from their own line with a scrum. Matt Whitaker carried well from a retreating pack giving Tom Lennard time to clear. Relief was temporary and punishment severe. Moments later Louis Keeley was collecting his and Sidcup's second try. On this occasion the winger left a less challenging conversion that was gratefully accepted by Tom Shea. The Crescent Farm fans warmly applauded the 12-3 lead with the first quarter nearly complete. It had become apparent that the excellent Sidcup pack had the upper hand in the set scrum. In addition Sutton were struggling with their lineout ball. Additionally and unexpectedly Freddy Bunting missed a chance to narrow the deficit as he slipped slightly on the muddy surface attempting another penalty. Then the visitors were further hampered as fullback Gareth O'Brien departed with an injured knee to be replaced by Ciaran Mohr. Once more it was a marvellous kick, this time a 50/22 by Tom Lennard that put the visitors in the opposition 22. S&E pressed for a score and were brought back for a penalty. Declining the easy three points they took the tap and Matt Whitaker celebrated his birthday with a try on the ground where he had previously recorded his 100th league try. Freddy Bunting added the extras and Sutton trailed 10-12 on the half hour.

Sutton & Epsom won a penalty at the restart as optimism rose amongst the ranks of the travelling support. Seconds later they were relieved that play was brought back for a knock on as Sidcup had intercepted and a certain try from 70 metres was denied. With half-time approaching Alex Mount received a yellow card. Not only was the Sutton scrum under pressure their front row had incurred the wrath of the referee over the technical issue of the scrums engaging. The result was a ten-minute breather for Mount for the accumulated offences. Reduced to 14 Sidcup had a wonderful opportunity to make the scoreboard reflect their pack's dominance. The 14 men from Rugby Lane appeared to have navigated the choppy seas to the safe waters of half-time harbour but the Kent men scored with the final play of the half. Taking the ball blind from deep the ball-carrier stepped out of a low tackle and an overlap opportunity developed from halfway. With clinical efficiency fullback Dan Masters strode home and Tom Shea's conversion was met by the whistle that concluded the first period. The 19-10 interval lead was a fair reflection of superiority that Sidcup



enjoyed in the key areas of the lineout and scrum that had provided the vital possession.

The second half began with the Black & Whites still numerically hampered and before anyone could debate if they could survive without further addition to the scoreboard Sidcup had their third try. Outside centre George Bird breezing through the defence to notch up their bonus point try which was effortlessly converted by Tom Shea for 26-10. Sutton showed their defiance a minute later. From a ruck on the 22 Matt Whitaker opted for the most direct route and found clear water before he evaded the last couple of defenders to score his second try. Freddy Bunting added the conversion and with that kick recorded his 200th point of the league campaign. Sutton & Epsom trailed 17-26 and hope lingered on.

It was Sidcup's turn to pin Sutton & Epsom back with a 50/22. Though S&E were now back to their full compliment the hosts immediately created a chance and how on earth they did not score will remain a mystery to all who were present. The Black & Whites cleared their lines from a 5-metre scrum but it was a temporary stay of execution. In contrast to the recently butchered offering Connor McDonald excelled with a wonderful solo effort weaving his way to the line. Though the conversion faltered with the score at 31-17 it was threatening to become a long afternoon for the visitors. That threat became a reality five minutes later. Forced back into their 22 the visitors conceded a penalty. The hosts opted for a scrum then ran wide and Connor McDonald had the ball again, with the defence desperately trying to cover men outside, he ghosted in for his second score. Tom Shea added to his account and Sidcup extended their lead to 38-17.

With 15 minutes remaining Sutton needed to carry the game to Sidcup and attempt to get something from the fixture. A fine kick return by Angus Findlay ably supported by replacements Callum Gibson and Dan Jones got S&E into the 22. There followed a Sutton try that owed more to Heath Robinson than Christopher Wren. From a central position Tom Lennard chipped ahead and the ball was not secured by the defence in the ensuing chaos the ball ended up in the right hand corner where Freddy Bunting was on hand for his first try of the season. Sutton & Epsom now had a very attainable target, the fourth try and a valuable bonus point, despite trailing 22-38.

Sutton suffered the immediate handicap of Callum Gibson becoming the second member of the front row union to get a yellow card through accumulated indiscretions. Sidcup went for the jugular only to be denied by Alex Mount's tackle under the posts forcing a spillage. The award of a 5-metre scrummage under their own posts was a mixed blessing for the Surrey men. The pack was shunted back, the posts were waving dramatically and Number 8 Nick Jansen touched down for a magnificent seventh Sidcup try. Tom Shea added the easiest of conversions for his tenth point of the afternoon as his side led 45-22.

The contest was over but there began the game within the game as Sutton went in search of their bonus point. First of all Matt Whitaker stormed to the halfway but to no avail. Then a wonderful run down the wing by Angus Findlay ended as he failed to get his pass to Ellis Rudder who was in support. The veteran Whitaker again went on the rampage and threw in a kick ahead for good measure. A penalty was kicked into the corner and the 5-metre lineout was lost. Then on the final play of the game Ellis Rudder broke clear in the 22 and passed to Matt Symonds. The rapturous cheers of the Sutton supporters turned to groans as the referee whistled for a forward pass. The game ended with Sidcup the clear winner by 45-22.

If there was a Man of the Match Award it should have gone to the Sidcup pack as they were magnificent to a man. The domination of the scrum, lineout and giving their backs front-foot ball was the telling factor in this game. Sutton & Epsom will regroup with a weekend off from the cut and thrust of league action before the visit of London Cornish on 2 nd March to Rugby Lane. For those wishing to attend please note that it will be a 3pm kick off.

Sutton & Epsom: Gareth O'Brien, Angus Findlay, Ellis Rudder, Freddy Bunting ©, Matt Symonds, Tom Lennard, Joe Lovatt, Tariq Al Khaldi, Alex Mount, Tom Boaden, Josh Glanville, Ewan McTaggart, George London, Rob Hegarty & Matt Whitaker.
Replacements: Callum Gibson, Dan Jones & Ciaran Mohr.

Sidcup: Dan Masters; Connor McDonald, George Bird, Sam Leek, Louis Keeley, Tom Shea, Simon Vincent, Teddy Gibbons, Jonathan Fordham, Sam Carmen, Ben Stock, Steven Evans, Fred Ruff, Billy Williams & Nicholas Jansen.
Replacements: Harry Large, Tom Epps & Alex Ure.

Epsom dig deep to beat Gravesend

2 December 2024



Sutton & Epsom RFC 21 Gravesend 19. Saturday 3rd February.

It has reached the business end of the campaign and for all clubs a studious look at the table and the remaining fixtures will determine their aspirations. For Sutton & Epsom and Gravesend it was a fixture that would relieve relegation fears for the victor but increase anxiety for the defeated. When the clubs met earlier this season on the Rectory Field it was a match rather ruined by the referee's penchant for puritanical pedantry as the crowd endured an endless stream of penalties. Gravesend triumphed 36-29 with their clinical lineout securing multiple tries. On Saturday, with great credit to referee Kasey Allen, those present enjoyed a rousing contest unimpeded by the whistle as the Black & Whites secured their first win after a quartet of losses.

On a cloudy but mild afternoon on an excellent surface Gravesend kicked off playing towards the clubhouse. The temptation to watch England play Italy was too great for many and a rather Spartan gathering assembled. As England's plight increased so did the crowd watching the local contest. The opening five minutes of high tempo rugby with both sides attacking with gusto set the tone before the first scrummage interrupted the entertainment. The backs probed, the defences demonstrated thunderous tackling and the kickers sparred for territorial advantage. If Sutton were not wary of the Gravesend pack before the start they had an unpleasant reminder on the quarter hour mark. A penalty was conceded and the ball kicked into the corner. The lineout ball was taken cleanly. The initial surge was halted but slickly the ball was spun to the blindside where Brendan Kelly was in splendid isolation and had the easiest task to score in the corner. Fortune favoured S&E as Josh Smith's finely struck conversion came back off the upright. Gravesend led 5-0 with Sutton left to ponder discipline and penalty counts.

Any anxiety in the ranks of the Sutton supporters was instantly assuaged. The visitors cleared the restart but Gareth O'Brien and Ellis Rudder combined to run it back into the Gravesend 22 to win a penalty. It was the hosts' turn to kick into the corner for the attacking lineout. The first assault saw Freddie Bunting close to glory but an earlier infringement meant the home team had a second chance. As it has been for over a decade the go-to man was Matt Whitaker and he delivered. Perhaps conscious of his veteran status he arrived clean-shaven this week, though it only took days off his appearance it had not diminished his strength and footwork near the line as he powered over. Freddy Bunting's conversion put Sutton & Epsom ahead 7-5.

It was now that Gravesend winger Andrew Cooke entered the fray. His first run was rather lateral but evaded too many defenders before the ball was marshalled into touch. That was merely an appetiser to his next contribution. He gathered a clearance in his 22 in the middle of the pitch and ran the ball straight back into the Sutton 22 before being denied a sensational try. Perhaps it needed that fright to ignite the hosts. S&E now put together their best phases of the match as forwards and backs in unison swept down the pitch recycling the ball at pace. The attack ended with a penalty for a high tackle. Yet again the crowd waited to see if a 5-metre lineout would be converted into points. Once more with clinical efficiency the forwards controlled the ball and advanced to the line for lock Josh Glanville to score. Captain Bunting bisected the uprights to extend Sutton's advantage to 14-5.

The remainder of the first period was played out without further addition to the scoreboard. The indication of the first half was that this match was evenly poised with Gravesend not only dangerous through their powerful pack but carrying significantly more attacking threat in their back division than was seen in the October meeting. For S&E the lineout was functioning superbly, the set scrum had manfully met the challenge and they were playing with pace and precision. The sides turned around with all to play for with Sutton holding the upper hand 14-5.

The Rugby Lane crowd nearly had the perfect start to the second half. Centre Lawrence Elliott went from the sublime to the ridiculous. He picked the perfect angle to break the line and strode purposefully into the Gravesend 22 with a try looking probable he then threw out a pass that could generously be described as unforgiving as the bemused winger, Ellis Rudder, watched the ball speed towards the advertising hoardings. Though Sutton stole the lineout ball they could not manufacture another opening. Soon the Rugby Lane XV was to be on the defensive. A penalty in the Black & White 22 saw the visitors opt for a scrummage and as they went wide a kick through rolled against the corner flag as Sutton scrambled in defence. This started a period of relentless pressure. The hosts did not aid their cause by failing to find touch with a clearance. The Kent men were now playing their best rugby and it seemed to be a question of when rather than if they would score.

However, it was now that possibly the key factor of the fixture was becoming evident. The Sutton defence was obdurate in the extreme, to a man they tackled tenaciously and got on their feet eager to put in another hit. Almost miraculously the line held as Gravesend were frustrated time and again as they were held up over the line. Eventually the visitors scored and it took exceptional work from winger Matthew Brady twisting and turning to score in the corner with multiple tacklers in attendance. Josh Smith converted exquisitely from the touchline as they made it a two-point deficit, 12-14. Significantly it had taken ten minutes of siege warfare for the try which must have emboldened the resolve of the hosts whilst equally left the visitors asking what do we need to do to score. From the restart Gravesend were hampered by a yellow card as an instinctive outstretched arm, with no malice intended, caught Kyren Ghumra's head. The winger had to be replaced by Matt Symonds but Sutton had ten minutes to play against 14 men.

Reacting to the numerical superiority with great urgency the home team went in search of points to extend their lead beyond a solitary score. Soon they were given an opportunity. Despite being awarded a penalty very much within the capabilities of the prolific Bunting boot the captain chose to go for the corner. His bravery was rewarded as the lineout was secured and the pack advanced to the line for Chris Farrell to score. The vital conversion was added by Freddy Bunting and the 21-12 lead meant that Gravesend would have to score twice in the final quarter of an hour.

If Sutton had been under siege before their third try they now endured an all out assault from Gravesend. It was the type of rugby that has every spectator on the edge of their seat living every carry and every tackle. The previous fortitude had transformed to cussed resilience and was on the way to heroic defence. Gravesend opted for scrums but the Sutton pack refused to yield. When the ball went wide the visiting backs opted for solo glory rather than swift passing and were met by scything tackles. The longer the line held the more desperate were the attacks. If the Kent men picked the wrong options to their great credit they did not offer up the knock-ons or penalties to assist the Sutton cause. Eventually centre Chris Brady crossed the whitewash and Josh Smith made it a two-point game once more as Sutton led 21-19. Crucially Sutton had eaten away significantly at the clock and only a couple of minutes were left.

It was now a test of game management and S&E controlled possession with admirable skill advance to the 22. On the attack they put through a speculative kick to the try line. Though it did not result in a score and gave Gravesend the ball it left the visitors with the Herculean labour of scoring from the length of the pitch. Moments later the final whistle blew and Sutton had won a victory of great significance. The manner of the success built on passion, team spirit and determination should hold them in great stead for the remainder of the campaign. For Gravesend they earned a bonus point but they put in a performance vastly superior to the earlier encounter and they certainly have all the assets required to navigate their way to safety.

There is no game next Saturday but the league continues on 17 th February with a trip to Crescent Farm to play the improving Sidcup who like S&E are on 38 points in the league but a place higher on points' difference.

Sutton & Epsom: Gareth O'Brien, Kyren Ghumra, Lawrence Elliott, Freddy Bunting ©, Ellis Rudder, Tom Lennard, Steve Munford, Alex Mount, Chris Farrell, Callum Gibson, Josh Glanville, Ewan McTaggart, George London, Rob Hegarty & Matt Whitaker.
Replacements: Tom Boaden, Tariq Al Khaldi & Matt Symonds.

Gravesend: Jamie Fautley, Andrew Cooke, Chris Brady, Josh Smith, Matt Brady, George Bruce, Ben Kite, Brendan Kelly, Terry Papworth, Jamie Forsythe, Tom Bird, Harry Brooker, Matt Hewitt, Samraj Chahal & Connor Murphy.
Replacements: Stan Dadson, Ben Reeve & Harvey Dean

Image - Robin Kennedy