



Sutton & Epsom RFC Hold On For A Vital Victory

8 January 2023



Sutton & Epsom 13 - Bournemouth 8. 7th January. The combination of seasonally inclement winter weather and the Yuletide celebrations created a 5-week lay off from all league rugby for the Sutton & Epsom Rugby squad. This welcome respite from the ravages of an underwhelming campaign does have the proviso that the S&E is now forced to play on ten consecutive Saturdays to complete their fixture list. The Black & Whites gained revenge on Bournemouth, who had narrowly defeated them 28-25 at Chapel Gate in October, with a hard fought 13-8 success. Sutton & Epsom gave a debut to Jamie Flatley at 10 and Kieran Finney, back from university, made his first start of the season to become representative Number 44 for S&E this campaign.

There was also a welcome return to the colours from Messrs Bunting and Martey. The miserable weather was probably appropriate for two teams at the wrong end of the table who were desperately slugging it out for a victory. Bournemouth kicked off and Sutton had the advantage of a sporadic wind. The visitors dominated the opening exchanges and encamped in the S&E 22. A sweeping move to the left hand corner saw the hosts scrambling in defence and despite Kyren Ghumra's tackle Ryan Morrell was on hand to score. Grant Hancox's conversion from the flank slid wide but the Lions led 5-0 after an impressive opening ten minutes. From the restart Sutton were awarded a penalty and had an opportunity to open their account. Freddy Bunting thumped over the penalty and Sutton trailed by 3-5. Moments later the returning centre was addressing a more challenging kick from 45 metres but despite his best endeavours he failed to bisect the uprights.

In the opening quarter it appeared that the Bunting boot was the only Sutton & Epsom currency as they had enjoyed precious little possession. Then a startling break by Jamie Flatley had the crowd on their feet as they enjoyed S&E's best passage of play. Five minutes later Number 8 Tom Brooker intercepted a wayward pass on halfway, leaving all the chasers in his wake he strode home to score. Freddy Bunting chipped over the conversion and the Rugby Lane team led 10-5. Despite the scoreboard the men from Chapel Gate were enjoying the majority of the territory and possession. They made light of the slippery conditions and spun the ball wide at every opportunity in an effort to replicate their earlier success. The Sutton & Epsom defence was dogged and organised and the visitors were denied any further opportunity to add to their account in the first period. Indeed it was S&E who extended their lead on the half hour via the good offices of Freddy Bunting who added another penalty for 13-5.

For the remainder of the half the Surrey men grew in confidence and began to enjoy more possession. Centre Antony Fitch, with no malicious intent, received a harsh yellow card for a high tackle on Robbie Martey and the visitors were reduced to 14 men. Moments later the referee brought proceedings to a halt with Sutton 13-5 ahead at the interval. Sutton started the second half superbly as they tried to take advantage of their numerical superiority. A powerful scrum sent their opponents into reverse and won a penalty. From the line out Tom Brooker carried powerfully to the line.

Numerous phases and carries continued to inch the ball towards the posts. Just when a try appeared to be inevitable a thunderous Bournemouth tackle dislodged the ball and the visitors were awarded a scrum. Their sterling defence was rewarded as they cleared their lines and they returned to their full compliment with Sutton having failed to score a single point against the 14 men. On the hour came a moment of great controversy. Jamie See threaded a wonderful kick behind the Bournemouth defence that came to rest a couple of yards from the line. Robbie Martey raced forward and intelligently slid in to gather the ball and the cover defence instinctively dived on the winger on the deck. Robbie Martey regained his footing and scored. However, the referee awarded a penalty to Bournemouth.

The visitors refreshed their pack with their bench and the fresh legs made a significant impact in the final quarter. It was the Lions pack who now had the ascendancy at the set scrum and from that sturdy foundation they set about reducing the deficit. The relentless pressure was rewarded with a penalty on the Sutton 22 with ten minutes remaining. Sensibly Grant Hancox stepped up to knock over the kick to make it 13-8 and put Bournemouth within a score. The closing stages of the match were to be anything but a relaxing affair for the Sutton faithful. In time added on the Black & Whites were showing commendable game management as the forwards kept the ball at close quarters. Then disaster struck as an isolated forward conceded a penalty. It was kicked to the corner and the Dorset men had a 5-metre line out. The visitors were repelled but the hosts conceded another penalty. After a lengthy discussion they opted for the tap penalty.

Their followed a relentlessly slow advance towards the Sutton & Epsom posts. Inch by inch the Bournemouth pack moved towards glory and an inevitable try. It was all hands to the pump for the Black & Whites as they threw themselves desperately into every tackle and veteran centre Jamie See stole the ball. A jubilant Sutton player kicked the ball towards the 2nd XV pitch and the referee blew his whistle to conclude the afternoon's entertainment. Victory by 13-8 was essential for S&E if they were to entertain hopes of survival.

The Black & Whites will hope the nature of this victory will create the necessary confidence and momentum to ignite their campaign. Jamie Flatley made an impressive debut at 10 playing with an assured quality and demonstrating dazzling footwork that bodes well for the future. The Sutton & Epsom pack was outstanding on an afternoon made for attritional rugby. Bournemouth matched Sutton & Epsom blow for blow and could have taken the honours at the death in a contest both sides needed to win and the visitors failed by the narrowest of margins.

Next Saturday, with sincere apologies to the rest of Sutton & Epsom's esteemed opponents, is a red-letter day as the club travels to the famous Old Deer Park to play the prestigious London Welsh. It will be the third time Sutton & Epsom have visited the Exiles and this will be the third location enjoyed but the first time in 120 years that they have had the privilege. In October the two teams fought to a standstill beneath a splendid rainbow and it was honours even with a 15-15 draw that was highly entertaining.

Sutton & Epsom

Sam Hurley, Robbie Martey, Freddy Bunting, Jamie See, Kyren Ghumra, Jamie Flatley, Austin Bell, Tom Boaden, Alex Mount, Will Lloyd, George Drye, Josh Glanville, Chris Farrell, Rob Hegarty & Tom Brooker.

Replacements: Kieran Finney. Not Used: Jack Howes, & Ciaran Mohr.

Bournemouth

Ryan Morrell, Ash Taylor, Adam Higgins, Antony Fitch, Oli Granger-Williams, Ben Meaden, Grant Hancox, Alan Manning, Conrad Carkeet, Gianluca Firetto, Matt Warwick, Connor McCaffrey, Ben Kimber, Ciaran Smyth & Joe Desmond.

Replacements: (all used) Jordie Wayman, Tom Napier & Ben Goodall.

Kinsella Hat trick The Highlight

8 January 2023



Sutton & Epsom RFC Women 39 - Medway Women 7 - Saturday 3rd December - The Sutton & Epsom Women's XV have enjoyed much success in recent years. The impressive performances have continued this season in Championship South East 2 in the third tier of the rugby pyramid. They started the day in second place in the table snapping at the heels of Battersea Ironsides. The Black & Whites were unbeaten at home whilst their opponents, Medway, in contrast had only recorded two wins this season. The match went according to form with Sutton winning in style by 39-7.



On a cold afternoon under lights at Rugby Lane Medway kicked off with S&E playing towards the Cabbage Page. The hosts went in search of the opening score to stamp their authority on proceedings. Stern defence and S&E errors thwarted the early promising opportunities. After 10 minutes a huge clearance by Jayne Meadows was complimented by a superb kick-chase. Sutton turned over the ball and Jayne Meadows glided through a gap and sauntered home to open the scoring. Though the experienced fly half failed to convert her own try the hosts were leading 5-0. The next try was a sensational solo score by Aegean Leech that demonstrated all the qualities required for a top class back. With great vision she cut back inside, running with balance and speed she evaded numerous tacklers to score. Jayne Meadows added the extras for a 12-0 lead.

As the first quarter was ending Jayne Meadows sublime cross-field kick had the defence scrambling and the ravenous Sutton chasers forced the turnover. The initial opportunity was wasted but this was just a temporary stay of execution. A burst from Jo Evans broke the line and Rachel Kinsella, left with plenty to do, finished superbly in the corner despite a thunderous covering tackle. The touchline conversion fell short as the Surrey women stretched their lead to 17-0. The visitors stormed back with a surging run from full back Katie Young. Encouraged by this the forwards took over and pressed hard to open the Medway account. Prop Hannah Lee powered her way over from close-range for a well-deserved try. Jemma Thripp's sweetly struck conversion bisected the uprights to reduce the deficit to 7-17.

As the interval approached winger Lucy Hoad was only denied a try by a fine cover tackle. The ball was swung back to the opposite side of the pitch and Jo Evans perfect pass put away by Rachel Kinsella for her second try of the afternoon. Jo Evans, taking over the kicking duties, failed to add to the 22-7 score. However, Sutton had suffered a significant loss in personnel as Jayne Meadows was forced to retire with a hamstring injury. The fly half had oozed class all game, orchestrating the attack with prodigious territorial kicking, thoughtful distribution and the opening try. S&E reshuffled the deck as Jo Evans moved up from 15 to 10 and replacement Abby Wynne slotted in at full back. In the dying moments of the first period Lucy Hoad was again thwarted by a tremendous tackle and soon after the referee blew for half time with Sutton & Epsom leading 22-7.

Medway needed to score early in the second period to try to turn the tide. They responded with great spirit and were soon pressing on the Sutton line. The Black & White defence was up to the challenge and having cleared the danger introduced Emily Grainger and Isabelle Keith off the bench to replace Rachel Balcombe and Natalie McCall. The Priestfields outfit were enjoying their best passage of play as they encamped in the host's half but try as they might they could not add to their score. Indeed it was the Rugby Lane team that were next to cross the whitewash. A dominant scrummage provided the platform to spin it wide. Rachel Kinsella was denied her third score but was able to offload to Aegean Leech for the easiest of tries. Jo Evans added the conversion for a 29-7 lead.

The game entered the final quarter with the team from Rochester determined to add to their solitary try whilst Sutton hoped to exploit any gaps that might appear. The game swung from end to end as a try-saving tackle Abby Wynne denied a deserved score for the visitors. Moments later Rachel Kinsella was again thwarted by Katie Youngs' tackle.

Perhaps it was fitting that the best team try of the afternoon concluded with Rachel Kinsella completing her hat trick. A clean line out ball was advanced by the forwards, the ball was released to the backs and a perfect pass by Aegean Leech was gathered by the flying winger who finished with aplomb. Sutton & Epsom missed the conversion but had stretched their lead to 34-7. Perhaps the frustration of being denied the additional score that their efforts warranted led to a bit of frustration in the Medway ranks. The Kent team conceded a penalty and one of their number was deemed too loquacious for the referee's tastes and they were marched back an additional 10 metres. With five minutes left of the clock the hosts added a seventh and final try. It was the turn of replacement Abby Wynne to demonstrate agile footwork to weave her way to the line to make it 39-7. Though there were no additional scores the visitors showed great spirit in trying to add to their account.

Nobody watching would have begrimed them a try as their second half performance and effort deserved more than they got. The referee blew the final whistle and Sutton & Epsom had maintained the pressure on the Battersea Ironsides who also had an impressive win at Canterbury, 36-15.

The Black & Whites thoroughly deserved their win. It was an excellent performance from all of the squad. The front row triumvirate of Jones, Forsyth and Styan maintained the solid platform from the scrummage. The back five provided a constant stream of quick ball for the back division. Sutton have considerable pace in the three-quarters with Zoe Smith spreading it wide to the creative hub in the centres Olivia Lambe and Aegean Leech. Wingers Rachel Kinsella and Lucy Hoad got the ball with time and space and on this occasion it was the former who took the glory with a tremendous trio of tries. In addition Jo Evans coming into the line from full back is another potent weapon. Medway fought hard to the bitter end and were competitive from the first to the last minute with the pack providing territory and possession but they could not convert pressure into points.

Sutton & Epsom

Jo Evans, Lucy Hoad, Aegean Leech, Olivia Lambe, Rachel Kinsella, Jayne Meadows, Zoe Smith, Tia Jones, Harriet Forsyth, Caroline Styan, Alex Parker, Rachel Balcombe, Alice Clarke, Bernadette Rees & Natalie McCall.

Replacements: (all used) Emily Grainger, Isabelle Keith & Abby Wynne.

Medway

Katie Young, Marisa Gould, Alisha Coulson, Naomi Quinn, Aimee Haslam, Jemma Thripp, Emily Stalley, Hannah Lee, Zoe Gardiner, Gemma Duncan, Alex Davis, Caroline Jordan, Anna Saunders, Chloe Sedge & Corinna Griffiths.

Replacements

Michelle Darby, Ann Robertson & Ellie Warren.

Sutton and Epsom RFC denied at the death

8 January 2023



BANBURY 12 SUTTON & EPSOM RFC 12 - Saturday 3rd December - saw the start of the reverse fixtures and for both clubs, who are struggling at the bottom of the table, it was a vital encounter. The occasion was shrouded in sadness for Sutton due to the most unexpected and tragic passing of their President during the week. Robert Knight was a magnificent ambassador for the club, an ever-present supporter not only at home but also away and, above all else, a wonderful man and excellent friend to all who knew him. He will be much missed.

The hard fought contest, before a large crowd swelled by the Christmas lunch and the importance of the match, ended honours even, 12-12. S&E gave a debut to Lawrence Elliott at 15 and Brad Meeson had his first outing this campaign since his recent nuptials. On a cold but sunny afternoon on a heavy pitch Jamie See set the game in motion following the minute's silence. The hosts included in their ranks Soane Tonga'uia, the 40 year-old former Tongan and Northampton prop, who made a predictable impact in the set scrum. With the Black & White pack shunted into reverse and conceding a penalty the early advantage was with the hosts. Indeed they opened the scoring after 10 minutes with an impressive catch and drive as prop James Leonardi was ushered over the line. Scrum half Ed Phillips missed the conversion but Banbury led 5-0.

Sutton and Epsom's riposte was immediate as they stormed into the Oxfordshire team's 22. The ball was spun wide and Angus Findlay passed to Brad Meeson who tried to squeeze in at the corner. The despair was short-lived as the whistle blew and the referee brought it back for an earlier penalty for the visitors. Sadly, Sam Hurley slipped on his approach and the penalty struck the upright. Kyren Ghumra, whose arrival had been hindered by car troubles, was brought onto the wing to replace Angus Findlay. The Black & Whites, with Rob Hegarty and George Drye carrying with great effect, pressed hard to get on the scoreboard.

Another back move concluded with debutant Elliott's grubber rolling into touch by the try-line flag. Though the Bulls cleared their lines Sutton's next attack was successful. A line break by George Drye followed by a floated pass found Brad Meeson who scored in the corner. Sam Hurley's immaculate touchline conversion meant S&E now enjoyed a narrow 7-5 lead. The Bulls went for an immediate response and it came through their sizeable pack and another line out.

As the home crowd urged their pack ever onwards from halfway they were awarded a penalty. The ball went wide and twice Ben Tame's thunderous tackles stopped the hosts. The half ended with S&E in the ascendancy as Kyren Ghumra was twice close to glory. The first time an inside pass from scrum half Austin Bell was adjudged to be forward as the winger was homing in on a try. The second was the final play of the first period as the ball went down the line the last pass went awry and ended in touch rather than being touched down.



The referee concluded the first half with the visitors enjoying a slender 7-5 advantage. The game continued with an instant reminder of the powerful pack of the hosts. Driving Sutton off their own put in on the S&E's 22 they unwisely opted for the boot and did not benefit from the advantageous position. In contrast Sutton threw away three points when under the posts and 5 metres from the Banbury line. The Black & Whites were awarded a penalty that was reversed for an off-the-ball infringement after the whistle.

The Bulls came close to rubbing salt into the wound with an interception but the referee called play back denying an almost certain try. As the heavy home pack tired on the claggy surface space began to appear that S&E looked to exploit. The half back combination of Bell and See both enjoyed a couple of stunning breaks. It was from one of scrum half Bell's bursts that evergreen Sam Hurley broke into the 22. Will Lloyd exploited the blind side and supplied a perfectly timed pass for James Caddy who finished with style with his expertly angled run to the line. Though the conversion drifted wide Sutton led 12-5 with 15 minutes to play.

The visitors pressed for another score to create a cushion that would mean Banbury would need to score twice. Jamie See's burst with the supporting James Caddy put the Black & Whites in prime position. But all came to nought after winning their scrum ball and a couple of phases from the forwards they lost control of the ball with the line at their mercy. Then the Bulls were given a lifeline with a penalty near halfway. A superb kick spiralled towards the corner but Lady Luck smiled upon the visitors as it crossed the touchline in the in-goal area resulting in a 22 drop out. However, the Oxfordshire men soon had their hands on the ball once more and forced a line out 20 metres from the try-line.

Another perfect catch and controlled drive saw the Bodicote boys roll relentlessly ever onwards. The forwards were stopped on the line but in an instant James Miller was presented with the ball and he supplied the finishing touches. Ed Phillips held his nerve to add the extras to level the score at 12-12 as the game entered time added on.

There was enough time for a few anxious moments but it ended honours even. A result that neither side wanted but one that favoured the hosts as S&E stayed in the bottom two. Banbury enjoyed a significant advantage at the set scrum for a substantial period of the game and their two tries came from formidable forward work with catch and drives.

On reflection one might have expected them to have carved out more opportunities to have added to their account. Despite struggling for a solid platform to attack, Sutton & Epsom created enough chances to have won the game but faltered at the crucial moments. For the visitors the back row trio of Tame, Hegarty and Caddy were superb. Austin Bell had arguably his best game at 9 whilst Jamie See rolled back the years with his breaks from 10 and with a promising debut from Lawrence Elliott there were many positives for S&E if not enough points taken from this encounter.

The action returns to Rugby Lane next Saturday when Sutton & Epsom host Camberley RFC for the first time since September 2012. When the clubs met in September this year at Watchetts Recreation Ground the hosts won 43-21 with Josua Lewan scoring a first half hat trick. The visitors will be keen for a repeat as they are in second place in the table in hot pursuit of leaders Wimbledon. The match kicks off at 2pm.

Sutton & Epsom: Lawrence Elliott, Angus Findlay, Stefan Cooksammy, Brad Meeson, Sam Hurley, Jamie See, Austin Bell, Tom Boaden, Chris Farrell, Will Lloyd, George Drye, Josh Glanville, Ben Tame, Rob Hegarty & James Caddy. **Replacements:** (all used) George London, Jack Howes & Kyren Ghumra..

Banbury: Thomas Gray, Alex Garbett, Quinten Blythe, Matt Goode, Jack Anderson, James Miller, Ed Phillips, James Leonardi, Ian Isham, Soane Tonga'uiha, Louis Tooth, Jacob Turner, James Hibbert, George Ding, Callum Horne. **Replacements:** (all used) Peter Boulton, Alex Nicholls and Dan Kirwin.

Mighty Maids Run Riot

8 January 2023



MAIDENHEAD 61 - SUTTON & EPSOM 24 - Saturday 26th November. Maidenhead started this season with four extremely impressive wins as they surged to the top of the table by the end of September. That was followed by five defeats before they returned to winning ways in the last round against Bournemouth. In stark contrast S&E have only one win and multiple close defeats in the opening ten encounters. The Berkshire club ran in nine tries in a thumping 61-24 triumph that reaffirmed the league standings of the two clubs.

On a chill and overcast afternoon Maidenhead kicked off. It only took a couple of minutes for the hosts to open their account. Pouncing on a sliced clearance they besieged the Sutton & Epsom line before hooker Dan Hostetler forced his way over the line. Greg Smith added the extras. Hardly had anyone had time to digest the early score when Harry Wells made a surging break from the restart and gifted a try to his centre partner Niall Crosley. Greg Smith added the conversion for 14-0. Sutton's pain in the first five minutes increased as they saw fly half Gareth O'Brien departing with an injured ankle. Jamie See went to 10 and Angus Findlay came off the bench for his league debut.

Maidenhead gave the visitors no time to settle and crossed the whitewash for their third try from Number 8 Will Macaulay. Greg Smith added two more points to his tally for 21-0 after only ten pulsating minutes. Sutton hit back as Seb Priest's sublime grubber into the corner set up a 5-metre line out. The pack ushered Matt Harwood over the line from his preferred distance. Sam Hurley added the conversion and the lead was cut to 21-7.

The second quarter may not have provided as many points but was still full of action. S&E lost hooker Alex Mount to injury on the half hour to be replaced by Jack Howes. Both teams squandered chances to add to their score as the first period entered time added on.

The Braywick Park team reasserted their authority with two more tries. Firstly, good carries by the pack culminated in a deft pass from a prop that found winger Scott Prince in space to finish it off. Not to be upstaged fellow winger Alex Turton scored a wonderful solo score from 60 metres to make it five tries. The metronomic Greg Smith bisected the uprights on both occasions as the first half concluded with Maidenhead comfortably placed at 25-7.

The second period began with a brutal reminder of who was in charge. A strong carry by flanker Ed Atkins set up Niall Crosley for a stunning break deep into the Sutton & Epsom half before setting up fullback Jamie Maddern for the try. Greg Smith chipped over the conversion for 42-7. Then Harry Wells was given a yellow card for a breakdown infringement. Sutton & Epsom certainly made their numerical advantage pay as they quickly scored from another disciplined effort from the pack from a 5-metre line out with captain Chris Farrell taking the plaudits. The conversion went awry as S&E trailed 12-42. The Black & Whites were the next to touch down courtesy of a remarkable line out that rumbled 40 metres down the paddock. The ball was finally released and Austin Bell put Seb Priest in at the corner. Sam Hurley converted from the flank for 19-42.

Restored to their full compliment the Berkshire team regained their scoring mojo as a dummy from James Maddern flummoxed the Surrey defences and flanker Jack Norris finished off with a 20-metre burst to the line. Greg Smith perfect afternoon with the boot ended with his only missed conversion with Maidenhead 47-19 to the good. A couple of minutes later it was more stunning play from the brilliant Berkshire backs as replacement Charlie Scott delayed his pass to perfection to put in the returning Harry Wells. Normal service resumed from the boot of Greg Smith to extend the lead to 54-19. Scott Prince raced in for his second and Maidenhead's ninth, and final, try. Greg Smith was on target again to record his sixteenth point as he stretched the lead to 61-19.

The Rugby Lane men gained some small consolation on a chastening afternoon when they secured a bonus point when they scored a fourth try. Once more it was the forwards, and again a catch and drive from a line out. On this occasion it was replacement Rob Hegarty burrowing his way to glory. Maidenhead's Charlie Scott became the latest victim of the harsh sentence meted out to anyone found guilty of knocking on an attempted interception. With Maidenhead reduced to 14 and Sutton already with the bonus point the game petered out in the last ten minutes in stark contrast to the seismic opening exchanges. The Magenta men celebrated their well-deserved victory as the final whistle blew to conclude proceedings.

The host's victory was based on the power, pace and precision of their first class back division. Having gained the initiative with three early strikes Maidenhead never looked likely to be overhauled. The Sutton cause was not helped by key early injuries to not only their fly half but also their hooker. The home pack had a much harder afternoon. Indeed, the Black & Whites were entirely indebted to their forwards for their bonus point with four tries of similar style based around their improving line out.

The homeward stretch of the league season starts next Saturday, 3rd December, with the first of the reverse fixtures against Banbury. Back in September Sutton were forced to play at the neutral venue of Cobham RFC and the Oxfordshire club narrowly won a hard fought encounter by 26-22. If S&E felt downcast on Saturday when the referee brought the game to a close one can only imagine the emotions in the Banbury dressing room as they were thrashed 102-22 by league leaders Wimbledon. Both sides will be keen for redemption when they meet at Bodicote Park as Sutton & Epsom visit another new league venue this campaign.



Sutton & Epsom

Michael Davies, Sam Hurley, Freddie Bunting, Jamie See, Sebastian Priest, Gareth O'Brien, Austin Bell, Tom Boaden, Alex Mount, Will Lloyd, Josh Glanville, Matt Harwood, Ben Tame, Chris Farrell © & James Caddy.
Replacements (all used): Jack Howes, Rob Hegarty & Angus Findlay.

Maidenhead

Jamie Maddern, Scott Prince, Harry Wells, Niall Crossley, Alex Turton, Greg Smith, Archie Dunnill, Elio Mandozzi, Dan Hostetler, Elliott Beattie, Phillip Wells, Brook Harvey-Smith, Ed Atkins, Jack Norris & Will Macaulay.
Replacements: Mike Guida, Levi Meek and Charlie Scott.

Havant Heartbreak For Battling Black & Whites

8 January 2023



SUTTON & EPSOM 27 - HAVANT 30. Saturday 12th November - saw the visit of a familiar foe in Havant. Last season the Hampshire club did the double over the Surrey side. A cursory glance at the league table prior to the kick off would have suggested a continuance of this recent trend. By the final whistle this close fought match evoked memories of the two classic encounters of the 2013-4 campaign as the visitors returned home to Hooks Lane with a narrow 30-27 win but the hosts won many plaudits for their determined comeback.

There was a Sutton and Epsom debut for Sebastian Priest and another appearance for the veteran Steve Munford. Havant were also missing regulars like Elliott Bellman, Harrison Young and Scott Morris. After the silence for the Remembrance weekend the visitors kicked off in glorious sunshine on a mild winter's afternoon. The crowd were immediately on their feet as after a few phases James Caddy, in space on the blindside, gave a wonderfully timed inside pass to Stefan Cooksamy who had come off his wing. A weaving run for 40 metres saw the winger touch down for the opening score. Freddy Bunting duly obliged with the conversion to send the Rugby Lane crowd into raptures and Sutton and Epsom led 7-0.

The Hampshire men bounced back to draw level after ten minutes. This time it was Reuben Knight with the 40-metre break though he was denied just short of the line but support was on hand and a couple of passes later saw fullback Ben Chambers crossing the whitewash. Joel Knight added the extras to level the score at 7-7. It was not long before Havant were pressing for the lead. They drilled a penalty into the corner for a 5-metre line out. Resolute defence thwarted all that was thrown at the Sutton and Epsom line but the referee brought play back for an earlier infringement. Significantly it also meant a yellow card for S&E lock George Drye. The visitors immediately made their numerical advantage pay as hooker Sean Shepherd barrelled over from close-range. Joel Knight added the simple conversion and the Bedhampton boys had a 14-7 advantage. The fourteen men showed great spirit to restrict the opposition to only one additional Joel Knight penalty before parity was restored with S&E trailing by 7-17.

As the teams entered the second quarter the game ebbed to and fro before Joel Knight's boot extended the Havant lead with another well struck penalty for 20-7 after 30 minutes. The Black and Whites stormed back. A quickly taken tap penalty on halfway by Austin Bell saw the hosts burst into the 22 and Ciaran Mohr was bundled into touch five metres short. S&E regained possession as they peppered the line. First, a sublime offload by Jack Howes nearly created a try in the right hand corner. Then the ball swung to the opposite flank as Gareth O'Brien and Stefan Cooksamy tried in vain before it finally went wide for debutant winger Seb Priest to score in the corner. Freddy Bunting converted from the touchline for 14-20.

The promotion contenders quickly capitalised on a missed clearance to touch and the Red and Whites marauded forward. After sustained pressure it was that man Shepherd again who proved unstoppable near the line. Joel Knight continued his impeccable kicking for 27-14 and the thirteen-point cushion was restored. With the interval fast approaching the hosts were awarded a penalty and Freddy Bunting reduced the deficit and the half-time whistle blew with Havant leading 27-17.

S&E restarted the game as Havant looked for that vital fourth try and a bonus point to maintain their title challenge whilst Sutton were eager for early points to get within a single score. At once the Black and Whites had a penalty and Freddy Bunting made it 20-27. Sutton and Epsom were now in the ascendancy and within 5 minutes Freddy Bunting was standing over another penalty. The kick 10 metres from the touchline drifted agonisingly wide. It was a temporary respite. The visitors failed to clear their lines and conceded a scrum in their 22. The ball was spun wide and a James Caddy tap pass and a wonderful Ciaran Mohr offload had Jack Howes within a metre. The ball was recycled and swung to the opposite flank where Josh Glanville was on hand to supply the finishing touches. Freddy Bunting's conversion was greeted with a tumultuous roar with the score at 27-27. With a little less than 30 minutes to play the game had been transformed.

Not only the bonus point but also the win was under threat for the visitors. They responded in style pressing hard in the home 22. It was Joel Knight's turn to add a penalty and he accepted a simple three points that put the Hooks Lane team back into the lead, 30-27. Buoyed by this success they went in search of that elusive fourth try and a wonderful attack was quelled by scrambling defence. Moments later a surging break by Freddy Bunting had Sutton on the front foot. However, passing and handling errors now began to frustrate the hosts who were thrown back onto the defensive. From a 5-metre line out superb defence held Havant up over the line. Then agony as the drop out went out on the full and more pressure ensued with a 5-metre scrum for the Hampshire men. A chance in the corner went begging as the cover arrived and the ball was passed into touch.

Sutton were now under siege and the next clearance resulted in a yellow card for Seb Priest as he took the catcher out in the air. The home-team would have to survive the vast majority of the remainder of the game with only 14. Moments later a certain score was denied by a terrific tackle. At the death Havant declined a most kickable penalty in the quest for a bonus point. A poorly executed line out resulted in an S&E scrum that soon became a penalty. The Black and Whites valiantly tried to run the ball from 80 metres out but to no avail as at the first opportunity the Red and Whites kicked it off the paddock to end the game. A pulsating performance by both sides ended with Havant winning and remaining in third place snapping at the heels of Camberley and Wimbledon.

Narrow losses have been the story for the Black and Whites this season and, similar to the Oxford Harlequins game, there was much to admire in pushing a top four team to the brink. Their resilience in the final quarter was magnificent. It was a superb team effort from 1 to 18 against a side aiming for promotion that had run Wimbledon very close a fortnight earlier. For the victors 16 points from the metronomic boot of Joel Knight and a brace of tries from the rampaging hooker Sean Shepherd was the foundation for another win. The visitors created more chances, had more territory and possession and on those indicators were worthy winners. However, rugby is not as simple as that and if your defence is organised and tenacious, you are fit, score tries and have a quality place-kicker you will be very competitive as were S&E in this game.

After a weekend of quiet reflection the league season reaches its halfway mark with the resumption of hostilities on Saturday 26th November with Sutton's trip to Braywick Park. Maidenhead after winning the opening four matches topped the table but then lost the next five on the spin before finally recording another win on Saturday. Last season the Berkshire team won the corresponding fixture with a try on the final play of the game. With the Black and Whites penchant for close games this campaign perhaps we might once again get more last minute drama.

Sutton and Epsom: Ciaran Mohr, Stefan Cooksamy, Freddie Bunting, Jamie See, Sebastian Priest, Gareth O'Brien, Austin Bell, Tom Boaden, Jack Howes, Will Lloyd, Josh Glanville, Matt Harwood, George Drye, Chris Farrell © and James Caddy. Replacements (all used): Rob Hegarty, George London and Steve Munford.

Havant: Ben Chambers, Harry Carr, Joel Knight ©, Jacob Knight, Scott Morris, Reuben Knight, Wes Dugan, Armandus Morgan, Sean Shepherd, Jake Waterman, Richard Janes, Sam Vince, Nathan Bellman, Harry Ransom and Dylan Lawley. Replacements (all used): Luke Marks, Jarod Leat and Jonah North.

Sutton & Epsom beaten by table toppers

8 January 2023



WIMBLEDON 41 - SUTTON & EPSOM 10 - 5th November. **Sutton & Epsom** and Wimbledon rugby is always an entertaining Derby match. Last season was a very underwhelming campaign for S& E but it had two glorious highlights with home and away triumphs over their local rivals. This season the teams could hardly be enjoying more contrasting fortunes. After an opening day loss to Camberley the Dons have swept all before them with a magnificent seven wins taking them to the top of the table. In stark contrast Sutton & Epsom have a solitary success over Brighton and numerous near misses.



Images: Courtesy Robin Kennedy - Sutton and Epsom RFC.

The match ran true to the current form book with the dominating Dons triumphant to the tune of 41-10. On a chill afternoon with leaden skies that threatened rain throughout S& E welcomed back Robbie Martey but were missing four forwards who had run Oxford Harlequins so close last weekend. Freddy Bunting kicked off as Sutton had the slope in their favour whilst Wimbledon had the breeze. The game started at a high tempo with both sides probing each other's defences.

First blood went to the hosts as wave upon wave of attacks crashed against S& E's formidable defence until they won a 5-metre penalty. Scrum half Alex Kerr tried to catch the Black & Whites out with a quick tap but moments later Ollie Kitto was scoring in the corner. Ed Morgan's conversion missed as the Dons led 5-0. The visitors replied in an instant, harrying the hosts from the restart they were awarded a penalty and Freddy Bunting made it 3-5. The Rugby Lane team had to be at their resilient best. They were aided on several occasions as the Barham Road boys failed to apply the coup de grâce.

On 20 minutes, it was a forward pass that denied the Dons. Five minutes later they made amends in stunning style. From a scrum near halfway a rapid blindside break was superbly executed as Alex Kerr scored and Ed Morgan added the extras for 12-3. Next it was Ollie Kitto who looked like creating another try but a forward pass by a prop meant another score was chalked off. It was a temporary stay of execution as the SW20 outfit took advantage of a 5-metre line out. A clean catch and a powerful drive ended with Max Freeman scoring and Ed Morgan's boot increased the lead to 19-3 after half an hour. The Cuddington Crescent team brought on Matt Harwood for an injured Ewan McTaggart and tried to gain a foothold in the fixture.

Wimbledon was not content with their healthy lead and attacked at every opportunity as the Black & Whites' tackling had to be at its resilient best and they scrapped for every ball at the breakdown. Twice more the home supporters groaned when first another forward pass and then an errant delivery undid their best efforts. The first half ended with Sutton trailing 3-19. For S& E it was vital to score early in the second period to resurrect memories of the jinx that afflicted the league leaders last season. If the visitors could score perhaps all those missed chances in the first half would weigh heavily on the minds of the hosts. The match resumed with Wimbledon piling on the pressure down the hill. It only took five minutes for Ollie Kitto to add the finishing touches for 24-3 and his second try.

The hosts were in no mood to ease up and replacement prop Malek Touilzak broke from halfway but a delayed pass gave the Sutton cover the opportunity to escape and Tom Boaden was on hand to steal and the danger was averted. However, five minutes later Malek Touilzak made amends as he powered over from close range. Despite the conversion failing the lead was now 29-3 in deteriorating conditions. S& E finally got their hands on the ball and a well-angled run by Robbie Martey was only halted by a high tackle and Wimbledon were reduced to 14 men for 10 minutes. Sutton opted for the scrum and turned the screw winning a penalty and taking it quickly advanced into the 22.

With the hosts on the retreat with an overlap S& E inexplicably kicked the ball. But despair turned to delight as soon after replacement Jack Howes, only just on the pitch, scored from a well-executed line out. Freddy Bunting chipped over the conversion to reduce the margin to 10-29. With fifteen minutes remaining the game opened up. A quick penalty in their own 22 saw replacement Rhys Morgan make a thrilling break deep into the opposite 22 where Ollie Kitto was on hand to score and collect yet another league hat trick for the lethal winger this season. Ed Morgan's aim was true to make it 36-10.

As the Rugby Lane men went searching for a late consolation try the Beverley Meads men threatened to cut loose. Ed Morgan rounded off a fine afternoon at 10 as he dummied his way through the defence to score his team's sixth and final try. Though he failed to add the conversion to his try the Dons were now 41-10 to the good. In the final ten minutes Sutton's chances for an additional score were undone by errors, no doubt due to understandable weariness after the draining effects of so much defence and tackling. The hosts were not error free as the familiar forward pass returned and probing kicks came to nought.

The final whistle blew and the 41-10 result meant that the hosts collected another bonus point win to stay in pole position whilst the visitors contemplated life at the other end of the table. Wimbledon thoroughly justified their lofty status atop of the league. Slick passing in the backs with plenty of pace and skill, robust ball-carrying forwards and a hard tackling defence is a potent cocktail for success. Sutton were, to a man, unflinching in defence making tackle after tackle as they



tried to stem the flow but were second best on the day.

The league programme continues next week, Saturday 12th November, as Sutton host Havant who beat S&E home and away last season. The Black & Whites will be looking to redress the balance this time. The kick off will be 2:30pm at Rugby Lane.

Sutton & Epsom: Mike Davies, Stefan Cook, Freddie Bunting, Jamie See, Robbie Martey, Gareth O'Brien, Austin Bell, Tom Boaden, Alex Mount, Will Lloyd, Josh Glanville, Ewan McTaggart, George London, Chris Farrell & James Caddy.

Replacements (all used): Jack Howes, Matt Harwood & Jack Butt.

Wimbledon: Alastair Duddell, Ollie Kitto, Paul Hendry, Henry Peuble, Bradley Pinkham, Ed Morgan, Alex Kerr, Tom Boot, Harrison Scoble, Bradley Ugodulunwa, Christopher Dalley, Jack Cooke, Max Freeman, Jacob Farnworth, Zane Dallinger.

Replacements: Malek Touilzak, Mark Scott & Rhys Morgan.

Fortune Not Favouring The Bold

8 January 2023



SUTTON & EPSOM 19 OXFORD HARLEQUINS 22 - Sunday 30th October - With the clocks going back in the morning it was the last of the 3pm kick offs before the seasonal variations and Rugby Lane welcomed another new opponent, Oxford Harlequins. At the end of Round 5 the Oxonians were the league leaders having thumped the previously indomitable top dogs of Maidenhead but a duo of defeats in the last two weeks have left them in fourth place. Meanwhile the Black & Whites have attracted the label of 'Close But No Cigar' with a trio of narrow defeats and a draw leaving them in the drop zone. It appeared to be a question of whether the visitors could get their season back on track or whether the hosts could finally see out a close encounter of the frustrating kind. For the home supporters it was unfortunately the former as the visitors hung on to record a 22-19 victory.

It was selectorial swings and roundabouts for S&E as they welcomed back their influential ten, Gareth O'Brien, and gave a debut to Joe Reid but lost impressive centre Archie Fitzgerald to injury. The visitors initiated proceedings on a sunny and mild autumnal afternoon with S&E favoured by the breeze. From the outset the game was played at a furious pace. James Caddy gathered the kick off and countered with Tom Brooker and George Drye to the fore before a booming clearance from Gareth O'Brien sent the opposition scurrying back deep in their 22. The Quins won the ensuing line out and ran the ball hither and thither before being awarded a scrum 30 metres from the Sutton line. Excellent passing and rapid recycling overcame staunch Sutton defence as Andrew Jarvis touched down in the corner despite the tackle of Michael Davies. Ethan Fox failed with the challenging conversion but Oxford Harlequins led 5-0.

Hardly had the Rugby Lane crowd had time to digest another early and unpalatable offering when lightning struck twice and Andrew Jarvis repeated the dose in the far right corner. A scything line break and slick passing saw full back Jack Antoniou marauding towards the line only to be dragged down 5 short by a tremendous tackle by Freddy Bunting. However, support was on hand and with a superb Ethan Fox touchline conversion the visitors were 12 up in ten pulsating minutes. The tenor of the game was then illustrated by two penalties awarded. Firstly, the Oxonians declined a simple kick in front of the posts and then S&E attempted one from near halfway. Neither side garnered points and at this stage it seemed unlikely that OH would rue the gift of three points. In contrast from the Sutton miss Tom Brooker caught the drop out and returned the ball with interest deep into the 22. The ball went right and prop Will Lloyd, standing in at stand off, supplied an exquisite pass for Tom Boaden to power over. Freddy Bunting added the extras as Sutton trailed 7-12.

The Horspath Sports Ground men responded to the effrontery of the Sutton score and returned to the Black & White 22. The hosts conceded a penalty as a defender lay prone by the ruck, the gentlemanly opponents declined the skulduggery of throwing the ball at him as is the fashion in the elite game and spun it wide. Following a few phases it was brought back for the offside any way. A tap-and-go penalty reaped the reward and from the ruck near the line prop George Primett found the perfect line to receive the pass and score under the posts. Ethan Fox chipped conversion made it 19-7 on the half hour. With the approaching interval Sutton had to stem the tide and make an impact on the scoreboard. A bone-shaking tackle by Ben Tame on the influential 15 Jack Antoniou demonstrated Sutton's defensive resolve. Then in the dying embers of the half O'Brien and Brooker combined to put S&E in prime position. However, the opportunity for a morale-boosting score and a shift in momentum was squandered by a technical infringement at the scrummage. The visitors proceeded to clear and Mr Rodwell blew for half time with Oxford Harlequins 19-7 to the good.

Freddy Bunting got the action underway once more as the former league leaders looked to replicate the start. Sumptuous back play with sublime offloads brought the visitors within touching distance of glory. Yet it was S&E who turned over the ball and won a relieving penalty. Prop Will Lloyd had been replaced by debutant Joe Reid, 36 years young, who was to be influential from the next scrum onwards. Sutton's advantage at the set-piece now became complete dominance. The decimation of Reid's first scrummage was like a shot of adrenalin in the body of the home XV as confidence coursed through their veins. Soon the crowd were on their feet as Ollie Baptiste-Wilson sprinted down the touchline in front of the Memorial Grandstand, passed inside and Freddy Bunting sauntered home only to be denied by the winger's foot being in touch. S&E bulked up their pack as the Brobdingnagian lock Ewan McTaggart replaced Josh Glanville. As more destructive scrummaging followed the referee offered a cautionary word to the Oxfordshire pack but the inevitable yellow emerged at the next set-piece. The numerical advantage soon saw a second Sutton score. Bunting kicked to the corner, Captain Drye caught the throw and the pack remorselessly advanced over the line for Tom Boaden to score his second try. Freddy Bunting converted to trail 12-19.

In stark contrast to the first period the visitors opted to kick at goal from near halfway from a penalty awarded after the restart. Ethan Fox impressively extended the lead to 22-12. S&E made another change as Ross Parsons replaced Austin Bell at 9. But the significant change occurred when Quins' prop George Primett was injured at the next scrum. The referee explained the intricacies of the laws and briefly uncontested scrums were on the menu. The Black & Whites took full advantage as Ollie Baptiste-Wilson replicated his touchline tightrope tap dance on the opposite flank. To the delight of the crowd he dived into the corner. Freddy Bunting converted magnificently from the touchline as OH led by 22-19. Five minutes later amid great concern from both physios Tom Brooker was forced to retire having put in a thunderous performance and Josh Glanville returned to the fray.

The closing stages were utterly compelling as the Oxford Harlequins tried to force Sutton & Epsom back into their half whilst their opponents attempted to manufacture one final chance. The status quo was maintained in the arm wrestle for supremacy until deep into time added on. Finally, Sutton had a foothold in enemy territory and advanced towards the 22 only to be halted by foul means rather than fair. The penalty was eminently kickable to those who know the burgeoning reputation of Bunting's boot. The expectant crowd anticipated seeing the kicking tee being ferried onto the paddock but no. The hosts opted to kick for touch and go for the win. The first hurdle was overcome as they caught the throw. The forwards were now a mass of desperate bodies as the Sutton trundled forward in search of glory. Then a shrill blast of the whistle and despair for S&E and delight for OH as the visitors were awarded a final scrum. With Joe Reid off nursing an injured knee this was a far easier challenge and the ball was dutifully kicked off the park. The jubilant visitors, arms aloft, celebrated a very tough 22-19 win.

For Sutton there was much to admire. Through necessity Alex Mount was pressed into service as hooker and revelled in his new role and the line out was markedly improved. The triumvirate of Brooker, Caddy and Drye were outstanding ball-carriers in the pack. The ace up the sleeve was Joe Reid's appearance off the bench who was a wrecking ball in the set scrum. Meanwhile Ollie Baptiste-Wilson enhanced his reputation as a lethal finisher. However, it was a superb team performance against one of the prominent teams in the league. For the visitors it was a joy to watch the almost faultless handling and creativity of their back division with one-handed offloads commonplace. In an era of ever-increasing size it was a delight to see the rather diminutive centre Toby Haines buzzing around taunting the defence like the most annoying of mosquitoes being a constant pest with jinking runs and telling passes.

Following a trio of new league opponents the Black & Whites face familiar opponents in local rivals Wimbledon next Saturday 5th November. For those of you making the annual pilgrimage to Barham Road please note the kick off will be at 2:30pm.

Sutton & Epsom

Mike Davies, Stefan Cook, Freddie Bunting, Jamie See, Ollie Baptiste-Wilson, Gareth O'Brien, Austin Bell, Alex Mount, Tom Boaden, Will Lloyd, George Drye



©, Josh Glanville, Ben Tame, Tom Brooker & James Caddy.

Replacements (all used): Joe Reid, Ewan McTaggart & Ross Parsons.

Oxford Harlequins

Jack Antoniou, Josaia Ratulaveta, Toby Haines, Adam Field, Andrew Jarvis, Ewan Fox, Harry Burn, George Primett, Josh Archer, Joel Hopkins, Harvey Tricker, Alan Purchase ©, Titus Waldock, Callum Fitzpatrick & Ross Toward.

Replacements: Jorn Voegtli, Paco Estaban, Ralph Jones.

The Agony and the Ecstasy

8 January 2023



ROYAL WOOTTON BASSETT RFC 31 - SUTTON & EPSOM RFC 29 - 22nd October. This was **Sutton & Epsom**'s first ever match against **Royal Wootton Bassett** RFC. Both clubs were desperately in need of a victory with S&E's solitary victory only just better than their host's winless start to the campaign. In front of a large crowd swelled by Ladies' Day at Ballards Ash, a euphoric home crowd roared on their team to a 31-29 victory in a match of fluctuating fortunes.

Under cloudy skies but spared of any rain Freddy Bunting kicked off the contest for Sutton and Epsom. It has become an unfortunate this season that S&E are slow out of the blocks when on the road. The opening fifteen minutes of this match was sadly no exception. After five minutes not only had RWB lock Josh McCafferty scored a try from close-range converted by Troy Cusack but also they had been reduced to 14 with a yellow card issued to Number 8 Tom Brooker. In addition prop Alex Mount had departed injured to be replaced by Will Lloyd.

Inspired by the early score the Wiltshire All Blacks pressed hard to make the most of their numerical advantage. The Black & Whites defence was rather too porous as first Number 8 Kyle Lovell and then winger Jone Waqadanidrola made significant breaks. The first Sutton & Epsom attack ended with Kyren Ghumra departing with a torn hamstring and Stefan Cooksammy entering the fray. Approaching the quarter hour mark the hosts won a 5-metre line out and this time the ball was spun wide and full back Sam Williams ran a superb line to scythe through the defence and score under the posts. Troy Cusack made it 14-0 in as many minutes.

S&E finally awoke from their slumber and began to claw back the deficit. The reliable boot of Freddy Bunting immediately got them on the scoreboard with a perfectly struck penalty for 14-3. It was RWB's turn to concede a penalty and be punished with the familiar 5-metre line out resulting. The scrappy S&E line out fortunately ended with a knock on providing Sutton with a scrum. A slick set move resulted in Ollie Baptiste-Wilson taking the aerial route to score in the corner. Freddy Bunting converted from the touchline to make it 10-14. Five minutes later the ugly Lane kicker bisected the uprights for another penalty success to reduce the gap to a solitary point, 13-14.

The Malmesbury Road men were starting an unfortunate trend of conceding penalties at the breakdown, a first half trifle that was to turn into a torrent in the second period. Cheered on by the sizeable crowd the home team rallied and were indebted to a sublime 50/20 kick by Troy Cusack as he rolled the ball into the far right corner. The RWB line out, which was possibly their greatest strength in this contest, provided clean ball and centre Daniel Hale supplied the finish. Troy Cusack added the extras to extend the lead to 21-13. There was time for one more Freddy Bunting penalty attempt but it was blown wide and the half concluded with the hosts enjoying an interval advantage of 21-33. Both camps had plenty to reflect upon in a contest that was far from over.

The weather held and Royal Wootton Bassett restarted the game defending their 8-point advantage. From the outset they were on the back foot. It was their turn to be defending a 5-metre line out after a penalty and moments later to be reduced to 14 men. The referee was exceedingly consistent in his punishments. The difference was that unlike the Wiltshire line out which was very secure the Sutton version was totally unreliable. Ten minutes of pressure and numerous opportunities in the left hand corner were squandered.

Finally, tactics turned to Bunting's boot and another three points were added for 16-21. The S&E cause was being aided by an outbreak of penalties that had reached epidemic proportions that was infecting the Ballards Ash XV. After a quarter of an hour in the second period after carries from Boaden and Harwood the backs took over. Archie FitzGerald muscled over the gainline, the ball was recycled and Ollie Baptiste-Wilson finished with aplomb. Though the conversion from the flank failed it was all square 21-21 as the game entered the final quarter.

The one-way traffic was halted when RWB on their next visit to S&E territory won a penalty just outside the 22 adjacent to the posts. Effortlessly Troy Cusack regained the lead with the hosts 24-21 to the good. A minute later the visitors scored their best try as Ollie Baptiste-Wilson completed his hat trick. Tom Brooker burst down the blindside from halfway, sold one dummy and then passed to the speeding winger who did the rest.

Despite the errant conversion Sutton and Epsom led by 26-24. From the restart Tom Brooker took the catch but fell heavily and was forced to leave the pitch. The Black & Whites continued to press hard to extend their lead and with the frequency of penalties conceded by the hosts it was unsurprising when an opportunity within Freddy Bunting's range arrived. Once more the Rugby Lane kicker's aim was true and the visitors led 29-24 with five minutes left on the clock.

Indiscipline now hit the Surrey team's ranks. Ominously the ball was kicked into the corner from a penalty. Valiant defence was matched by infringements resulting from sustained pressure. Finally, the ball went wide and the space was exploited as the Wiltshire All Blacks' hooker Scott Parry touched down for their fourth try and a bonus point. Troy Cusack was the man of the moment and put the Malmesbury Road team ahead 31-29 with the conversion. Sutton moved ever onward into the host's half. Archie FitzGerald burst into the 22, was tackled and the whistle blew but it was a penalty to the home team against the centre for rolling on the deck. With great relief the ball was kicked to touch, the whistle blew and the celebrations began for Royal Wootton Bassett.

It was a demoralising day for the Black & Whites as, once again, they failed to overcome the significant handicap of a dreadful start. With defeats by 4, 3 and 2 points and a draw in their first seven matches it is a serious case of 'what might have been' as they now join their hosts in the relegation zone. The lethal Ollie Baptiste-Wilson had the unusual feat of scoring a league hat trick for S&E but still ending up on the losing side. For RWB their line out was excellent, the kicking of Troy Cusack superb and the running of Man of the Match Daniel Hale was enough to engineer their first win of the campaign.

Once again Sutton will be breaking new ground in terms of league opposition when they host Oxford Harlequins next Saturday 29th October. It will be last of the 3pm kick offs at Rugby Lane before switching to the seasonal variations. After reaching the giddy heights of topping the table consecutive defeats to title rivals Wimbledon and Havant has seen the Quins drop to fourth in the league but they will still provide stiff opposition for the Black & Whites.

Sutton & Epsom

Austin Bell, Kyren Ghumra, Archie FitzGerald, Freddie Bunting, Ollie Baptiste-Wilson, Jamie See, Owen Clemett, Alex Mount, Chris Farrell ©, Tom Boaden, Matt Harwood, Josh Glanville, Ben Tame, Rob Hegarty & Tom Brooker.
Replacements: Will Lloyd, George London & Stefan Cooksammy.

Royal Wootton Bassett

Sam Williams, Mark Trowbridge, Daniel Hale, Connor Tomley, Jone Waqadanidrola, Troy Cusack, Rhys Higginson, Harry Daynes, Scott Parry, Jake O'Neill, Epi Druavesi, Joshua McCafferty, Jack Daynes, Gavin Ougan & Kyle Lovell.
Replacements:

Phillip Bardwell, Oliver Craig Baycroft & Iwan Floyd.



Epsom's Rugby Lane draws a crowd

8 January 2023



SUTTON & EPSOM 15 - LONDON WELSH 15. Saturday 15th October. It had been many years since **London Welsh** had visited Rugby Lane. In fact, it was 1958 and their side despite containing four full internationals only narrowly won a highly entertaining contest by 13-8. Fast forward to Saturday afternoon and both sides arrived with a meagre one win from five league matches and were much in need of a morale boosting victory. The visitors would argue that the fixture computer had not been kind as they had already faced four of the top five and perhaps their lowly status in the bottom three did not reflect their potential. At the final whistle the sides could not be separated, and it ended 15-15.



Freddy Bunting initiated proceedings as the Black & Whites kicked off in bright sunshine with a notable crosswind and ominous clouds looming on the horizon. From the outset London Welsh's intentions were clear as they spread the ball wide and all their backs got their hands on the ball. Sutton and Epsom held firm and demonstrated a steely defensive reserve. Not surprisingly in the wind played havoc with many of the early line-outs. There were many early scrums from the throws blown awry. In the scrummage the hosts were encouraged by early dominance as they shunted the Welsh pack, depleted by injuries and absentees, into reverse. Despite their dominance in the set-piece scrums twice Sutton and Epsom were penalised for driving upwards, much to the irritation of the front row triumvirate of Mount, Craig and Boaden. In contrast in the loose the visitors were in control providing their backs a stream of possession as the back row trio of Davies, George and Williams burrowed and scavenged to great effect.

London Welsh had the first scoring opportunity but their endeavours were scuppered when they were penalised for crossing near the Sutton line. A swift riposte by Sutton and Epsom saw them take quick tap penalty with the ever-alert Ross Parsons breaking downfield. This led to a series of attacks with James Caddy prominent but the visitors' defence was resolute and organised and the crowd continued to wait patiently for an opening score. The Old Deer Park XV sought to convert their favourable possession statistics into points. First of all their pack's relentless advance to the line was halted as they were held up over the line. Freddy Bunting's drop out from the Sutton line was a temporary respite. A moment later it required a superb collective effort to bundle the speeding Jonathan Ilori into touch by the corner flag. There followed relentless red shirts besieging the Sutton line. Finally, the Welsh dropped the ball in the left-hand corner stretching for the line. Sutton's heroic defence was rewarded with a 5-metre scrum and the siege was lifted by a magnificent kick to halfway.

In the last ten minutes of the half the hosts found their rhythm and gained some possession. Kyren Ghumra had a run, Archie Fitzgerald muscled his way through and Robbie Martey continued to impress in his new role at 15. The best opportunity came from a wonderful break by Ross Parsons but a couple of phases later a very unforgiving long pass led to a knock on. The half ended with a penalty awarded to the visitors that was within kicking range. Dafydd Manley's effort was blown wide. There was time for one last Welsh flurry as Elliot Hopkin jinked down the touchline before finally being bundled into touch. The first period finished 0-0 but the game was anything but boring as both defences had found immense reserves of resilience and defiance to prevent any score.

The match resumed with Robbie Martey prominent in defence and attack for the hosts. Sutton & Epsom opened the scoring in spectacular fashion after five minutes. Stealing the line out ball in their 22 they ran the ball from defence, wonderfully timed passes saw them break into the Welsh half where the ball was transferred to Ollie Baptiste-Wilson who finished in style evading all challengers in a 40-metre burst. The redoubtable Bunting added the conversion from the flank for a 7-0 lead. Ten minutes later, roared on by their numerous supporters, London Welsh levelled the score. From a line out on the S&E 22 the Welsh pack advanced remorselessly towards the posts, finally halted on the line the ball was released and scrum half Hywel Williams scored. Dafydd Manley added the simplest of conversions for 7-7.

The weather worsened as an initial drizzle transformed into driving rain in a ferocious wind. The more the weather deteriorated the more prominent the visitors became. The talismanic Rohan Pixley was introduced on the hour by London Welsh as S&E switched props with Will Lloyd replacing Alex Mount. The visitors were awarded a penalty that they kicked to the corner and the crowd anticipated another catch and drive score but the Sutton pack held firm to win a 5-metre scrum. Relief was short-lived as the Red shirts battered the Black & White line as viciously as the rain swept the pitch. Rohan Pixley was denied but passed to Tololima Savaiinaea who was held up near the line before Dafydd Manley popped over for the try. The centre failed to add the extras to his try but London Welsh led 12-7.

Sutton stormed back at once and encamped in the Welsh 22. Awarded a 5-metre penalty they battered the line but the forwards could not breach the defiant defence. The ball went wide and Archie Fitzgerald forced his way over in the corner. The conversion from the flank drifted wide but the scores were level, 12-12. The storm abated and the ground was bathed beneath a spectacular rainbow as the game entered its final 5 minutes. With the game in the last minute of normal time the hosts were awarded a penalty. Despite the 50-metre distance Freddy Bunting stepped up to put S&E into a 15-12 lead that was greeted with a deafening roar of approval. Joy turned to agony in time added on when London Welsh were awarded a penalty of their own in front of the uprights on the Sutton 22. A calm Dafydd Manley sent the Old Deer Park supporters into raptures levelling the game at 15-15 and a minute later it was all over. It had been a magnificent occasion, in no little part due to the wonderful and numerous London Welsh supporters, and a draw was a very fair result. The visitors will reflect on their first half dominance and multiple chances that were denied by the parsimonious S&E defence. The hosts will rue their naïve game management after taking the lead at the death. However, both teams can take great heart in immense defence in a contest where every yard had to be earned. For Sutton sporting their livewire back three, Robbie Martey was magnificent and Ollie Baptiste-Wilson, once again, scored a spectacular try. The hosts not only kept a clean sheet in the first period despite having so little ball but showed real character to retake the lead in the dying moments. Meanwhile, despite so many absentees, the visitors adapted to the



situation with aplomb to put in a performance that would have swept aside a less cussed opponent. Their pack was tireless and particularly effective at the breakdown.

Next Saturday, **22nd October**, Sutton and Epsom play Royal **Wootton Bassett**. It will be the first time in the club's history that they will play the Wiltshire club. The kick off will be 3pm at Malmesbury Road and any supporters might like to avail themselves of the team coach.

Sutton & Epsom

Robbie Martey, Kyren Ghumra, Archie Fitzgerald, Freddie Bunting, Ollie Baptiste-Wilson, Jamie See, Ross Parsons, Alex Mount, James Craig, Tom Boaden, Matt Harwood, George Drye ©, Tom Brooker, Rob Hegarty, James Caddy.

Replacements: Will Lloyd & Chris Farrell, Austin Bell (not used)

London Welsh

Dylan Casella, Elliot Hopkin, Tololima Savaiainaea, Dafydd Manley, Jonathan Ilori, Osian McAvoy, Hywel Williams, Andrew Black, Jack Burnett, James Buncle, James Downing, Charlie Bramble, Ben Davies, Rhydian George & Tom Williams.

Replacements

Max Brewer, Rohan Pixley & Adam Nixon.

Sutton and Epsom Rugby Just Fall Short

8 January 2023



BOURNEMOUTH 28 SUTTON & EPSOM 25: Sat. 1st Oct. Sutton & Epsom travelled to Chapel Gate with confidence following their opening win of the season against Brighton the week before. The revolving door of selection was again in evidence as the Black & Whites lost influential fly half Gareth O'Brien and Ben Tame to injuries sustained at training on Thursday night but Messrs Craig, Glanville and Clemett returned from the sick list.

Freddy Bunting kicked off in bright sunshine playing against the significant wind and up the slight slope. From the outset both teams were keen to spread the ball wide and a thoroughly entertaining contest had begun. The host's early dominance was assisted by S&E conceding far too many penalties. It was from one of these infringements that Grant Hancox opened the scoring after five minutes for a 3-0 lead. Moments later they had the chance to extend the lead but opted to kick the penalty into the corner for the attacking 5-metre line out. The Sutton defence repelled the first couple of strikes before the ball was spun wide for Brad Law to score. Grant Hancox added the extras from the flank to lead by ten points in as many minutes.

#	Team	P	W	D	L	PF	PA	+/-	TB	LB	Pts
1	Oxford Harlequins	5	5	0	0	144	97	47	2	0	22
2	Wimbledon	5	4	0	1	216	88	128	4	1	21
3	Maidenhead	5	4	0	1	193	106	87	5	0	21
4	Havant	5	4	0	1	147	96	51	4	1	21
5	Camberley	5	4	0	1	151	83	68	3	0	19
6	Bracknell	5	3	0	2	123	117	6	3	0	15
7	Bournemouth	5	2	0	3	109	136	-27	1	0	9
8	Brighton	5	1	0	4	128	182	-54	3	2	9
9	Sutton & Epsom	5	1	0	4	124	155	-31	1	2	7
10	London Welsh	5	1	0	4	105	159	-54	0	1	5
11	Banbury	5	1	0	4	105	171	-66	1	0	5
12	Royal Wootton Bassett	5	0	0	5	48	203	-155	0	0	0

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Emboldened by their fine start the Lions ran the restart from the 22 and only an errant pass prevented Josh Wickens from the opportunity to make a telling contribution. In fact the ball was recovered by Freddy Bunting and the Black & Whites had their first attack. Once more the visitors were thwarted by conceding a penalty and were soon on the back foot in defence. Following sustained pressure a long pass was thrown out to Jordie Wayman who was hugging the touchline. The bounce favoured the Chapel Gate team and the wing touched down in the corner. The challenging conversion failed but Bournemouth had a significant 15-0 lead in the first quarter.

George Drye, relishing in the role of captaincy, led the riposte that saw the visitors have a line out deep in their opponent's 22. Unfortunately Mr Long spotted an infringement and Sutton's hopes of getting on the scoreboard were thwarted by a careless technical error. However, five minutes later it was a case of 'Action: Take 2'. Great control by S&E was matched by superb defence until Bournemouth conceded a penalty near the uprights. The visitors opted for a scrum, the ball went wide and after a powerful carry by Archie Fitzgerald the ball was transferred to Kyren Ghumra who squeezed home in the corner. Freddy Bunting's touchline conversion went agonisingly close as Sutton trailed by 5-15. With the interval fast approaching the next score went to the hosts as Grant Hancox chipped over a drop goal as the Dorset side stretched their advantage to 18-5 with the elements.

The hosts pressed hard to add to their account and secure a sizeable buffer before they faced the strong wind. Dogged Sutton defence repelled a 5-metre line out that was followed by the Lions conceding a penalty at the scrum. Freddy Bunting cleared to halfway as the clock ran down. But on the final play of the half the alert scrum half Harry Warr intercepted and raced away to score. With Grant Hancox successful conversion the whistle blew with Bournemouth leading 25-5. The home team had dominated the breakdown and had been on the front foot for the majority of the contest and were worthy of their 20-point advantage. The Sutton cause had not been helped by the early departures of Ciaran Mohr and Dan Jones who were replaced by Sam Hurley and Luke Halford but many of their wounds were self-inflicted with the penalty count far too high.

The question on the lips of the crowd was whether a 20-point cushion was enough to counter the wind in the second period. Obviously the Black & Whites needed an improvement in quality and an early score. Having hardly made a mistake in the first half Bournemouth knocked on Ross Parsons clearance kick on halfway. An emboldened S&E spun the ball out to Kyren Ghumra who punished a weak tackle and ran in to score from distance. Freddy Bunting added the conversion and Sutton grasped the lifeline to now trail 12-25 and were back in the contest. The Lions looked for an immediate reply but the Sutton defence held firm before a penalty enabled them to clear. From a perfect catch and drive George Drye secured the ball and the pack marched to the line and Alex Mount added the finishing touches. Freddy Bunting did the necessary for 19-25 and the match was now very much in the balance with 25



minutes still to play.

The Surrey men were playing with confidence and in their next sortie Owen Clemett broke into the 22 but the scrambling home defence intercepted his inside pass that would have resulted in a try. As the game entered the final quarter S&E lost their hooker, James Craig, and the front row was re-organised with Alex Mount taking over throwing duties as Will Lloyd returned to the fray. Both teams looked more than capable of adding to the score. An error by the hosts, kicking the ball out on the full, gave the visitors a prime attacking position. Kyren Ghumra charged into the 22 with his hat trick in the offing but he was brought down by a superb tackle. Sutton had the consolation of a penalty and Freddy Bunting cut the deficit to three points as the Lions led 25-22. Within five minutes the Sutton centre had levelled the scores at 25 apiece with another calmly executed penalty. Trailing by 20 points at the break Sutton had overcome the significant deficit with ten minutes to play.

Bournemouth stormed back desperate to turn the tide. They were rewarded with a penalty of their own and Grant Hancox made no mistake to retake the lead 28-25. The Rugby Lane men threw everything at their opponents in search of another score. Rob Hegarty was prominent in the loose linking well with the ubiquitous George draw. Robbie Martey with intelligent angled runs threatened to make the telling strike. But the home defence was superb and once they got possession they managed the clock and closed out the game. A thrilling contest finished with Bournemouth recording their first victory of the campaign since the opening weekend of the season.

The 28-25 score reflected the closeness of a contest that could have gone either way or ended honours even. Bournemouth's defence was of the highest quality and they started the contest magnificently and bullied Sutton at the breakdown. However, S&E's response after the break was exceptional to level the scores. Owen Clemett playing out of position at 10 led the line with aplomb. George Drye was outstanding, securing the ball at the line out, leading his team and being at the heart of all Sutton's best moments. The returning Kyren Ghumra with a brace of tries was a potent threat. Once again the Sutton fitness shone through in the last quarter and Rob Hegarty was tireless. Ultimately the Lions shaded the contest with cool heads and fine match management in the final stages of a game that had the crowd on the edge of their seats.

Next Saturday the league goes into abeyance and the players can have a deserved weekend of rest and recuperation. Hostilities resume on Saturday 15th October with, perhaps, the highlight of the season being the visit of the historic London Welsh RFC. The Exiles have been making a rapid ascent of the league pyramid following the financial difficulties that led to an enforced reset in the lower leagues. The kickoff will be 3pm at Rugby Lane and it might be wise to arrive in good time as a sizeable crowd is anticipated.

Sutton & Epsom

Ciaran Mohr, Robbie Martey, Archie Fitzgerald, Freddy Bunting, Kyren Ghumra, Owen Clemett, Ross Parsons, Tom Boaden, James Craig, Will Lloyd, Matt Harwood, Josh Glanville, Dan Jones, Rob Hegarty, George Drye ©.

Replacements: (all used)

Alex Mount, Luke Halford & Sam Hurley

Bournemouth

Antony Fitch, Jordie Wayman, Brad Law, Grant Hancox, Josh Wickens, Mike Pope, Harry Warr, Tom Napier, Conrad Carkreet, Alan Manning ©, Matt Warwick, Joe Desmond, Ben Kimber, Ciaran Smyth, Jake Guildford.

Replacements

Luca Firetto, Connor McCaffery & Jack Young.