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Horsham hold a win against Sutton & Epsom RFC

9 March 2026

Horsham 26 Sutton and Epsom 20. 7th March.

In November Horsham travelled to Rugby Lane and were victorious. The Black & Whites scored a late Kyren Ghumra try to add to a Sam Lennie hat-trick and were indebted to a Freddy Bunting conversion to earn two bonus points in a 36-29 defeat.

On Saturday the Sussex club maintained their promotion push but were taken to the limit by a spirited Sutton and Epsom side. After a game of intense commitment from all parties, Horsham secured a 26-20 win that included a vital four-try bonus point.

Tom Lennard kicked off for Sutton and Epsom on a chilly afternoon at the splendid Coolhurst Ground as Ben Tame celebrated his 50th league appearance for the Black & Whites.

Horsham looked to spread the ball wide from the outset. However, Declan Nwachukwu spilled the ball under pressure from Jordan Huie to provide Sutton and Epsom with the first scrum in a most advantageous position near the 22.

Firstly Finlay Scott went close, then Josh Glanville was denied by a superb tackle from Archie Fox and, under intense pressure, Horsham number eight George Howard was issued a yellow card. From the ensuing penalty hooker Sam Lennie forced his way over for the opening try. Freddy Bunting split the uprights for a 7-0 lead for Sutton and Epsom.

Five minutes later Horsham were level. The hosts went on the attack and only determined defence prevented an instant reply. Sutton and Epsom survived a line-out in the corner when the Sussex pack were penalised for crossing.

The next Horsham attack proved more constructive. Taking advantage of defensive miscommunication near halfway, Tom Johnson made the decisive break and passed to supporting scrum-half Aaron Linfield, who scored. Caleb Raubenheimer added the extras to make it 7-7 after a thrilling opening ten minutes.

Despite the best intentions of both teams, it took another twenty minutes before the next score. Sutton and Epsom tackled relentlessly against opponents determined to move the ball wide, while Horsham thwarted the visitors' best efforts with excellent jackling.

Sterling Sutton and Epsom defence had already seen the hosts held up over the line. Eventually, similar to Sutton and Epsom's opening score, Horsham crossed from close range following a penalty when their pack would not be denied. Raubenheimer converted to give the hosts a 14-7 lead.

There was an anxious moment for Sutton and Epsom when Horsham threatened to extend their lead but a promising attack ended in the 22 with poor execution. Sutton and Epsom countered when Gareth O'Brien burst into the 22 and passed to Joe Lovatt, who was wrapped up by the cover defence.

Sutton and Epsom were brought back for a penalty as the tackle on O'Brien was judged too high. Freddy Bunting calmly took the three points to reduce the deficit to 14-10.

However, the intensity of the contest claimed its first Sutton and Epsom casualty as Finlay Scott was forced off with a hamstring injury. Sutton and Epsom reshuffled their lineup, with Josh Rea moving into the backs as Josh Glanville returned after earlier being replaced by Ben Tame.

The half ended with no further scoring but Sutton and Epsom's revamped XV were pressing hard to regain the lead. It had been a highly entertaining opening period played at a frenetic pace, with both defences showing a strong appetite for the physical contest.

In such a demanding encounter, fatigue on the fast surface looked likely to become a factor in the second half. Sutton and Epsom suffered another setback at the interval when hooker Dan Jones was forced off after aggravating a shoulder injury. Tom Boaden came on to start the second half.

Sutton and Epsom fight back

Sutton and Epsom began the second half with real purpose. Sam Lennie went agonisingly close to a second try but the referee, unsighted, awarded Horsham a drop-out after ruling the hooker had been held up over the line.

Undeterred, Sutton and Epsom stormed back through a weaving run from Jordan Huie. Their pressure resulted in a penalty directly in front of the posts, and captain Freddy Bunting reduced the deficit to a single point at 13-14.

Perhaps stung by their shrinking lead, Horsham increased the pressure but squandered an excellent opportunity with an uncharacteristically poor pass.

A solid Sutton and Epsom scrum then provided the platform for a familiar Rob Hegarty surge from number eight to relieve

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pressure. However, Horsham earned a turnover penalty through another excellent jackal.

Declining the shot at goal, Horsham kicked to the corner and were rewarded when Caleb Raubenheimer scored their third try. The fly-half showed both composure and strength to cross despite defenders hanging off him. The conversion from the touchline missed but Horsham led 19-13 with half an hour remaining.

Sutton and Epsom responded with determination. Another Sam Lennie run earned a scrum deep in Horsham territory and a penalty forced the hosts back to their line.

Horsham produced their best defensive set of the afternoon. The Sutton and Epsom forwards were initially repelled and when the backs joined the attack they too were stopped, with Sutton and Epsom again held up over the line.

The Sussex side countered immediately but Sutton and Epsom's pack won a relieving penalty after wheeling a scrum five metres from their own line.

The relentless nature of the contest was beginning to show as medical teams were increasingly required and several players on both sides carried knocks.

Late drama

The heroic defensive efforts were finally broken in the closing five minutes. Sutton and Epsom had repelled another Horsham attack before the hosts mistakenly kicked a penalty dead rather than securing a five-metre line-out.

From the restart the dangerous Declan Nwachukwu gathered the ball with space and ran it back superbly. The winger reached the 22 before passing to Tom Sanders, who ran in under the posts. Raubenheimer converted to give Horsham a 26-13 lead and secure their bonus point.

If anyone thought that try had finished Sutton and Epsom, they were quickly proven wrong.

With time added on and several Horsham players struggling with injuries, Sutton and Epsom launched a final assault. From a five-metre line-out they earned a penalty and this time powered over, with Rob Hegarty emerging as the scorer.

Freddy Bunting produced a superb touchline conversion to secure a bonus point for Sutton and Epsom, closing the gap to 26-20.

Sutton and Epsom were not finished and launched one last attack, with Adam Bibby running dangerously through the Horsham defence. The Black & Whites earned a line-out inside the Horsham 22 with the final play of the game.

Seconds later the Sussex side forced a knock-on and the referee's whistle ended a compelling contest.

Promotion race tightens

Round 19 confirmed Regional 2 South East as effectively a two-horse race between Sidcup and Brighton, although Horsham are now just one win away from the play-offs and a chance to return to Level 5 at the first attempt.

The hosts combined attacking flair with thunderous tackling and crucial turnovers. It was a credit to Sutton and Epsom that the final whistle was greeted by the home side with both joy and relief.

The physical nature of the match took a heavy toll on both squads, who will welcome a rest weekend before the league resumes on 21 March.

Sutton and Epsom will host Canterbury Pilgrims while Horsham travel to Balmoral Avenue to face Beckenham.

Sutton and Epsom

O'Brien, Scott, Bibby, Bunting (capt), Huie, Lennard, Lovatt, Lennie, Jones, Howes, McTaggart, Glanville, Pulvirenti, Rea and Hegarty.
Replacements: Boaden, Tame, Gerhard.

Horsham

Fox, Grogan, Sanders (capt), Johnson, Nwachukwu, Raubenheimer, Linfield, Osgood, Tredgett, Kilfeather, Denhart, Endacott, Smith, McLoughlin and Howard.
Replacements: Powell, Thompson and Knowles.

John Croysdill

Photo credit Robin Kennedy

Next fixture: Saturday 21st March: Sutton & Epsom v Canterbury II

Sutton & Epsom Fall Short in Entertaining 10-Try Battle at Rugby Lane

9 March 2026

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Sutton & Epsom RFC 27 Battersea Ironsides 38. Saturday 28th February.

With hindsight being, as ever, twenty-twenty vision, the defeat of the Black & Whites at Garratt Green has been viewed by some as the turning point of the season for Sutton & Epsom. A 15-point lead with seven minutes to go, depending on your loyalties, was either thrown away through incompetence or overturned by spirited brilliance as the Ironsides triumphed 24-22. Since that November afternoon the fortunes of the Rugby Lane team have headed in a southerly direction. Saturday's fixture saw Sutton & Epsom, in seventh, take on Battersea, in sixth, with a solitary point separating them. The visitors took the spoils in an entertaining 38-27 win to gain a bonus point victory that saw them rise into the play-off positions.

For the Black & Whites there was minimal disruption to the squad but welcome returns for Ewan McTaggart after his international adventures and Kyren Ghumra on the wing. There was an inauspicious start to the game for the hosts, with echoes of the match in November, as the kick-off went out on the full to initiate a scrum. Battersea immediately showed their attacking intent with a delightful chip and gather by Cameron Baker but he was met by a perfectly timed tackle from Gareth O'Brien. It started an opening quarter full of attacking intent by both teams that was met by sterling defence that thwarted fleeting moments of try-scoring potential for both XVs. On the quarter hour there was an unfortunate incident as Amir Sultan rose skywards to take a clearance kick. Kyren Ghumra slipped as he approached and the collision ended with a heavy fall. Amir Sultan, after a lengthy delay, had to be helped from the field to sympathetic and universal applause from the sizeable crowd. He was replaced by Lewis Waters and the accidental nature of the incident meant that Monsieur Brognard did not issue a card.

At the start of the second quarter Sutton & Epsom enjoyed their best period of play. In rapid succession they had opportunities. The first saw Ewan McTaggart and Jack Howes combine and the second was initiated by a Gareth O'Brien counter. Both ended in turnovers that were the result of insufficient support and swarming Battersea defence. The Rugby Lane supporters had the consolation of a Tom Lennard penalty after 25 minutes that put Sutton & Epsom into a 3-0 lead. The Ironsides responded in the perfect manner but in an unexpected way. A multi-phase attack was brought back for a penalty that was kicked to the corner. Sutton & Epsom stole the 5-metre line and cleared superbly to halfway. The visitors took a quick ball but with only two men available to counter it should not have been a problem. However, a surging run tore Sutton & Epsom apart and replacement Lewis Waters was in support for the try. Cameron Baker's conversion drifted wide but Battersea led 5-3.

The game continued to demonstrate the scoring potential of both teams as well as the defensive prowess of players frustrating opponents with timely turnovers. Sutton & Epsom hopes were raised, as so often is the case, with a robust run from hooker Sam Lennie. A man who relishes physical contact and has a deceptive turn of speed he broke free to advance to 10 metres out. Credit to the scrambling defence of the Battersea team that they reorganised and halted the hosts a couple of phases later. Unfortunately for Sutton & Epsom there was no silver lining to this cloud, as the subsequent penalty failed to add the three points.

As the first period entered time added on the visitors added another try from a stunning break. This time it was scrum-half Dan Thomas with a scintillating surge that beat the initial tacklers and found the wide-open spaces. His half-back partner Cameron Baker was on hand to provide the coup de grâce much to the delight of not only his charming parents but also the many travelling Ironsides fans who added much to a wonderful atmosphere at Rugby Lane. Baker added the simple conversion for a 12-3 lead. The half ended in frustration for Sutton & Epsom. Adam Bibby sensationally took the restart and Sutton & Epsom camped in the 22. A penalty was kicked to the corner, the lineout secured and replacement Dan Jones went close. The ball was recycled and Tom Lennard was enveloped and kept vertical for the turnover that concluded the first period. Battersea led 12-3 but no one doubted the potential for more scores in the second half.

Sutton & Epsom began the second half with relish spreading it wide with Kyren Ghumra making yards. The first scrum of the half saw a powerful drive and a penalty to the hosts. The expected kick to the corner and attacking lineout followed. Though they secured the ball Battersea stood strong and got a relieving scrum. Flanker Arboine, as he did all afternoon, carried to great effect and the Ironsides cleared. However, it was Sutton & Epsom's turn to counter for success. An arcing run by Lennie fed Ghumra and the winger, with plenty to do, sped down the line to score. The Black & Whites trailed 8-12. The visitors were stung into action. Awarded a penalty, they took the quick tap and moments later were agonisingly close to a try as wonderful Sutton & Epsom defence held them up over the line. Five minutes later the next Battersea sortie to the Sutton & Epsom 22 saw the visitors secure their third try. A catch and drive was controlled by the pack and Raph Arboine was on hand to score from close range. The Baker boot added the extras for a 19-8 lead.

Ten minutes later the whole nature of the fixture changed as Sutton & Epsom scored twice in five magnificent minutes of rugby. The first came from a Joe Lovatt kick on halfway as a favourable bounce ended in home hands. Dan Jones accelerated into the open spaces and passed to the fleet-footed Captain Bunting who ran in the try. Tom Lennard added the simple conversion. Rejuvenated by this try Sutton & Epsom were on the attack once more. Their vastly improved lineout secured the ball to initiate a formidable drive that resulted in a try for Sam Lennie. Despite the Lennard conversion from touch rebounding back off the upright the Black & Whites led 20-19.

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The men in green replied as if insulted by the hosts' effrontery at taking the lead. They stepped up a gear and immediately put Sutton & Epsom under the cosh. Despite heroic defence near their line Sutton & Epsom succumbed as Charlie Craig took the glory and Battersea regained the lead at 24-20. Earlier it had been a relief to see Amir Sultan return to the game after his injury. However, his return now took on Lazarus-like dimensions. Tom Lennard hoisted a cross-field bomb with the intention of exposing the opposition on halfway. This time the result for the soaring Sultan was much happier. A wonderful airborne take was followed by a sprint from halfway that left the cover a very distant second. Cameron Baker calmly converted for 31-20. Five minutes later the 'Sultan of Swerve' had the ball again and finished with aplomb from 20 out. With the conversion added and the scoreboard reading 38-20 the contest was over.

Sutton & Epsom still had bonus points to chase and to their credit hit back with gusto to score in time added on. Once again they were indebted to their clinical lineout and the tireless endeavour of their pack. This time it was Dan Jones who popped in under the posts. Tom Lennard converted to conclude the scoring as Sutton & Epsom lost 38-27 but gained a vital bonus point. No doubt the coaches will have been frustrated by the errors but it was a thrilling spectacle for the crowd who enjoyed 10 tries. Battersea punished Sutton & Epsom errors with ruthless efficiency and seemed to have that extra gear when required. For the hosts the lineout was transformed, the forwards were formidable in the set-piece and, encouragingly, the supporters enjoyed players running onto the ball from depth with pace. Finally, credit to Cyril Brognard whose officiating enhanced the game with excellent communication, a desire to create a flowing game and superb positioning for those tries from close range.

Next Saturday Sutton & Epsom venture to the Coolhurst Ground to play Horsham RFC for the first time in a league encounter. The Sussex club, having been relegated with Brighton last season, are keen to bounce back to Regional 1 South East at the first opportunity and will be out to secure their place in the play-offs. Meanwhile Battersea host Beckenham with both clubs still in contention for extending their season.

Sutton & Epsom: O'Brien, Scott, Bibby, Bunting ©, Ghumra, Lennard, Lovatt, Boaden, Howes, Lennie, McTaggart, Glanville, Pulvirenti, Rea & Hegarty. Reps: Jones, Duey & Tame.

Battersea Ironsides: Diamond, Sultan, Bourke, Campbell, Craig, Baker, Thomas, Borup, Chetwynd-Milo, Chetwynd, Kemp, Wharton, Arboine, Chitan © & Charles. Reps: Jones, McCleary & Waters.

John Croysdill

Photo credit: Robin Kennedy

Sweet success for Sutton and Epsom Rugby

9 March 2026

Beckenham 14 Sutton & Epsom 22. Saturday 14th February.

Last October a Tom Lennard penalty with the last kick of the game secured a Sutton and Epsom 22-19 win. A Beckenham side hit by injuries, with a George Bunton brace and the traditional Rimarni Richards try, had taken the game to the wire. Not quite as rare as the sighting of a fluffy-backed tit-babbler at Rugby Lane but the Black & Whites crucially won a second half. With the season meandering intermittently to a conclusion both clubs might be considering whether they will be involved in the inaugural play-offs. For the upwardly mobile fourth-placed hosts there is the possibility of embarking on four outings. Pessimists from the off-colour visitors might be fearing the 25th April match to decide who remains in Regional 2 South East. On Saturday, lightning struck twice as, once again, S&E won a second half and secured a vital 22-14 win to steady their nerves.

The Black & Whites were without their German international lock, Ewan McTaggart, as 'Die Schwarzen Adler' ('The Black Eagles') were in Portugal for the next round of the European Rugby Championship. Such inconveniences are most familiar to Beckenham with their Caribbean connections. For followers of rugby at this level it is a familiar tale of woe that injuries are never spread evenly from 1 to 15. This season for Sutton and Epsom the Number 9 shirt has been a hexed item of clothing and this week Sam Lovatt became the sixth player to don the cursed shroud. However, there was happier news with the return of Josh Pulvirenti to the colours. The Balmoral Avenue Brigade are no stranger to injuries and have done remarkably well this campaign despite regular absences of key personnel and once more they took the field minus stalwart players.

A year ago Beckenham lost their 2nd XV captain Graham Murray in a tragic traffic accident and there was a minute's applause in his honour before the kick off. Considering the recent weather, that might make a modern Darwin predict webbed feet for humans in the future, Balmoral Avenue was blessed with not only sunshine but a playing surface that was a credit to the hardworking ground staff. Freddy Bunting kicked off for Sutton and Epsom but it was Beckenham who seized the initiative. The home team dominated the opening 15 minutes playing at a high tempo they threatened to run away with the game. An ominous first scrum saw Sutton and Epsom shunted back on their own ball. The combination of desperate defence and inopportune handling near the line saw S&E survive until scrum half Jack Gurney opened the

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scoring from close range following mounting pressure. Josh Burke added the conversion for a worthy 7-0 lead.

This was not a case of the floodgates opening but, to the contrary, the visitors replied at once. A surging burst from Gareth O'Brien hitting the line at pace from fullback carried him from his own half to near the Beckenham 22. Adam Bibby running the perfect supporting line took the pass and coasted home. Freddy Bunting added the extras for a 7-7 score. Sutton and Epsom had weathered the storm and now began to dominate possession. What was to become the theme of the afternoon was errors undoing invention for both sides. A dropped pass, a penalty kicked dead and turnovers conceded all blighted the Rugby Lane men's progress. Approaching the 40-minute mark Jack Howes won a terrific turnover penalty and Captain Bunting decided on the 3-point option to put his team ahead 10-7. Despite a lengthy period of time added on the scoring for the first period had concluded and the Surrey men turned around 10-7 up.

With the alarming statistics for the 2025-6 season in terms of second half performances by the Black & Whites no one from Rugby Lane was counting numbers in the hen house. For the travelling supporters there was the satisfaction that the tide had turned. For the Balmoral Avenue faithful there had been more than enough evidence that they could take the honours as the fascinatingly poised match resumed. It was a fast start from all concerned as both teams sensed the importance of the first score of the second half. Reversing the policy of the season, much to the delight of ageing alickadoos, Freddy Bunting decided on taking a pot at goal after five minutes. Unfortunately for those with Black & White tinged glasses it narrowly missed.

The game became a stop-and-start affair as errors mounted. Though credit must go to the back row brethren on both sides whose industrious efforts thwarted promising openings, won turnovers and were a ubiquitous source of frustration. It was Beckenham, regaining the pomp of their earlier play, who seized the momentum and were rewarded with the next score. Winger Juai Charles carved through the defence to score and Josh Burke added the conversion to put the hosts 14-10 up. A perfectly struck restart from Freddy Bunting forced a restart drop out from the Beckenham line. Sutton and Epsom took advantage of the territorial position and won a penalty. The 3-point option was shunned for the kick to the corner with a dozen minutes of regular time on the clock. Fortune did not favour the brave but S&E only had themselves to blame as they lost the lineout.

Possibly the turning point of the match came with ten minutes left on the clock as Juai Charles saw yellow and Beckenham were reduced to 14 men. A simple three points were declined as Sutton and Epsom took a tap penalty. Lennie went close as the home forwards stood strong. However, as soon it went wide Gareth O'Brien took advantage of the visitors' numerical superiority to score out wide. The conversion failed but Sutton & Epsom had their noses in front by 15-14. It was a reinvigorated Black & Whites rather than the tiring version of recent times who now took the game by the scruff of the neck. The swerving, stepping and deceptively powerful Adam Bibby broke into the 22 to be felled by an excellent cover tackle. S&E maintained possession and replacement Dan Jones carried towards the line. Once more it was released to the backs and Tom Lennard dummied the cover and scored under the posts. Freddy Bunting chipped over the easy conversion for a 22-14 lead.

Two tries in a few minutes had altered the complexion of the contest. With the game within their grasp Sutton and Epsom tackled tenaciously and kicked sensibly to keep Beckenham at arm's length. The match concluded with two moments that were synonymous of the game. Firstly, Beckenham had an attacking lineout that gave them a great opportunity to get back into the match. It was inexplicably overthrown and lost… it was certainly not the first lost lineout during an afternoon punctuated by costly errors by both teams. Secondly, in the dying moments Sutton and Epsom were in a prime position to go for the bonus point try. The ball was secured and Tom Lennard floated the perfect kick to the corner where not one but two colleagues were waiting unguarded to score. Neither laid a hand on the ball and it hit a knee. The Benny Hill theme tune would have fitted perfectly for the ensuing fiasco as the ball went to halfway. Sanity was resumed and the ball was kicked off the field to secure the 22-14 win for Sutton and Epsom.

Once again this fixture provided excitement and tension until the final whistle. Sutton and Epsom prevailed for a win that was much needed after recent disappointments. Beckenham remained in fourth and have the prospect of promotional play-offs in their own hands. At the other end of the table Old Reigatian's 19-14 loss to Canterbury Pilgrims confirmed their relegation but who joins them is a matter for a very congested lower half of the table. As always the hospitality at Balmoral Avenue was exemplary. Amongst the throng of spectators was Dave Weller who had represented both 1st XVs. The erstwhile flanker, motor cycle racer and expert pumpkin carver diplomatically wore his Beckenham tie to the lunch but secreted his Sutton and Epsom version upon his person in case it would be appropriate. For those Beckenham members of a malicious disposition they may be praying for a heat wave in September because Mr Weller has entered the Welsh Iron Man in Tenby.

Another week off and the season resumes on the 28th February when Sutton and Epsom host Battersea Ironsides whilst Beckenham are at home to Gravesend who are snapping at their heels in fifth place.

Sutton & Epsom
O'Brien, Symonds, Bibby, Bunting, Scott, Lennard, Lovatt, Boaden, Howes, Lennie, Duey, Glanville, Pulvirenti, Rea & Hegarty. Reps: Jones & Tame. Unused: Payne.

Beckenham: Bosch, Bennett, Pennacchia, Jebb, Charles, Burke, Gurney, Baker, Aoke-Tiamu, Brown, Prince, Keefe, Moran, Ward & Knowles.
Reps: Richards, Ryan-Coker & L. Caddy.

Epsom scoring a try against Beckenham from a previous fixture. Credit Robin Kennedy.

John Croysdill

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Sutton & Epsom beaten by Gravesend as yellow card proves decisive

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Sutton and Epsom RFC v Gravesend Saturday 31st January. On an autumnal October afternoon Sutton & Epsom defeated Gravesend 29–12 at the Rectory Field. That victory in Round 6 sent them to the summit of Regional 2 South East. However, the current form of S&E has challenged the Podsnapian assumption of reaching the promotion play-offs. A season that started with great expectations has fallen on hard times.

In Round 16 Sutton slipped to another defeat, 37–26, as Gravesend leapfrogged them in the table to seventh place.

Saturday's fixture gave a debut to Tom Williams in the Number 9 shirt and he became the fifth starting scrum-half of the campaign. The returning Huie joined Duey on the bench but sadly a Louis could not be found. Recently gales, galoshes and gamps have been in vogue but the weather was blessedly more benign. Having been denied league action the previous weekend, the crowd were abuzz with anticipation as Gravesend kicked off the match.

It was an inauspicious start for the hosts as they immediately conceded a penalty and faced a Gravesend line-out five metres from their line with barely a minute on the clock. The initial drive was halted but another penalty followed. Despite stoic defence, the Kent team scored through the forwards with a sense of inevitability. The challenging conversion drifted wide as the visitors led 5–0.

From the restart indecision from Gravesend almost allowed Adam Bibby to gain possession. It was the set scrum that raised the spirits of the Rugby Lane crowd. From the opposition put-in, the home pack sent the Rectory Field forwards into disarray. A quick tap penalty and a kick ahead by Tom Lennard nestled a yard from the line and Adam Bibby dragged the defender over for a five-metre scrum.

Sutton won the ball but fine defence halted Bunting and then Lennie. The visitors had relief of sorts with their put-in under their posts, but the Black & White pack turned them over again. A snipe by Tom Williams was followed by Ewan McTaggart stretching out to score. Freddy Bunting added the easy conversion as S&E took a 7–5 lead after a dozen minutes.

If the Sutton scrum was excellence personified, the line-out was at the other end of the spectrum as the match entered a déjà vu phase. S&E line-out lost, Gravesend kick, and Kyren Ghumra ran it back to great effect. After two episodes of this entertaining drama, conveniently aired on either side of the paddock near halfway, Sutton scored their second try.

Adam Bibby made a stunning break from the middle of the park and entered the opposition 22. With his centre partner Freddy Bunting in support, he supplied a timely pass for his captain to score. Freddy Bunting added the extras to extend the lead to 14–5 at the end of the first quarter.

At last S&E won a line-out and it was worth the wait as the forwards drove at least 20 metres towards the line and were unlucky to concede a penalty. A moment of butterfingers from an unnamed source thwarted the hosts' next promising attack as Sutton dominated the territorial battle.

Gravesend exited their half in sensational fashion. Ben Hope, playing on the wing, collected the ball near touch by his 22 and set off. Breaking tackles, brushing aside defenders and gathering speed, he scored an outstanding try in the corner. The touchline conversion failed as the visitors narrowed the gap to 14–10.

The next significant moment was unfortunately a lengthy delay as the sawbones attended to the injured Samraj Chahal. Gravesend lost their totemic forward, replaced by Chris Brady, the sole representative of the Brady bunch on the afternoon as his brother had just returned from Dubai.

The Kent team responded to adversity by breaking free and going on the rampage into the Sutton half, with hooker Stan Dadson leading the charge. The visitors ended the first half in the ascendancy as they searched for the lead. They had to be content with a penalty, winger Josh Barnes obliging with the three points as the referee concluded the half with Sutton narrowly ahead, 14–13.

An entertaining first period promised a second half rich in tries and tension. Freddy Bunting resumed the action with Gravesend attacking the clubhouse end. S&E made a promising start with Adam Bibby making another superb break but on this occasion there was no support on hand to take the glory.

Referee Hampshire had already ominously called Captain Bunting over for a chat late in the first half, foreshadowing

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Sutton's walk along the disciplinary tightrope. With nearly ten minutes of the second period played and Gravesend on the Sutton line, the visitors were awarded a penalty. Lock Josh Glanville received a yellow card and the hosts were reduced to 14 men.

The Rectory Field men opted for the three points, Josh Barnes edging Gravesend into a 16–14 lead. The ten-minute yellow-card period proved the turning point. Gravesend exploited their numerical advantage with admirable skill and ruthless pragmatism.

From a scrum 30 metres from the Sutton line, Ben Kite kicked perfectly to Josh Barnes on the wing, who gathered and sauntered in for the try. He added the conversion to stretch the lead to 23–14. A couple of minutes later fellow wing Ben Hope added his second and Gravesend's bonus-point try. Barnes again converted, extending the lead to 30–14. The yellow card had cost Sutton 17 points by the time Glanville returned.

To their credit, the Black & Whites responded swiftly. The improving line-out secured possession and initiated another relentless catch-and-drive. This time there was no intervention as hooker Sam Lennie forced his way over. Freddy Bunting bisected the uprights to pull it back to 21–30.

Shortly after, the Rugby Lane faithful were left flummoxed by suicidal Sutton play. Nine points adrift with a quarter of an hour to go, a long miss-pass was sent out from their own 22. Fortunately the interception was not run in under the posts, and S&E gained relief through a penalty a few phases later. Sanity restored, the contest returned to an arm-wrestle around halfway.

Gravesend's fifth and final try was initiated by a superb clear-out at the ruck by prop Harry Brooker. A speculative kick ahead found space in the S&E 22 and visiting full-back Ben Stelfox took advantage of inadequate cover to score. Barnes' conversion made it 37–21 and took his personal tally to 17 points.

With six minutes left the contest was over and Sutton hunted the consolation of a bonus point. The Black & Whites struggled to penetrate a robust Gravesend defence, but benefitted from the punitive side of Mr Hampshire's nature as yellow cards were issued in quick succession to Stan Dadson and Les Falefatu in time added on.

Playing against 13 men, Sutton accepted the invitation. From a tap penalty Eric Duey powered over for the bonus-point try. At the final whistle, contrasting emotions were clear as Gravesend's players, fuelled by victory, recovered quickly, while Sutton's men laboured under the lactic acid of defeat. Gravesend had deservedly won 37–26.

In retrospect, the yellow card that Gravesend exploited so ruthlessly put paid to Sutton's hopes. The balance between devil-may-care ambition and league pragmatism remains elusive. Sutton's scrum was magnificent, the line-out frustratingly sporadic and the defence too porous. Gravesend's organisation and physicality blunted Sutton's width, while Ben Hope stood at the forefront of an impressive attacking display.

Supporters and players mingled in traditional fashion in the clubhouse, certainly not a bleak house, as the Kent side were buoyed by a sizeable travelling support rewarded with a fine victory.

With a deferential tug to Boz from a formerly tousled forelock, one might exclaim "what the Dickens" on noting yet another gap in the league calendar next Saturday. The season resumes on Valentine's Day as Sutton venture to Balmoral Avenue to face Beckenham, whom they narrowly defeated 22–19 earlier in the season at Rugby Lane.

Sutton & Epsom:
Ghumra, Symonds, Bibby, Bunting ©, Scott, Lennard, Williams, Johnson, Lennie, Boaden, McTaggart, Glanville, Tame, Jones & Hegarty.
Reps: Howes, Duey & Huie.

Gravesend:
Stelfox, Barnes, Filmer, Sims, Hope, Kite, Warren, Brooker, Dadson, Shorter, Bird, Falefatu, Bailey, Chahal © & Money.
Reps: Alderson, Brady & Harris.

John Croysdill

Rugby action Epsom against Gravesend credit Robin Kennedy -from a previous fixture

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Sutton & Epsom v Sidcup – Rugby match report

9 March 2026

Sutton and Epsom 12 Sidcup 28. Saturday 17th January.

Sidcup arrived at Rugby Lane buoyed by the wheels wobbling on the Brighton bandwagon. Back-to-back defeats either side of the festive break by their south-coast rivals had left the Crescent Farm side just one point off the top. For Sutton

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and Epsom, their top-five position – equating to entry into the play-off rounds – was under threat.

Before kick-off, the Black and Whites had to digest the unpalatable news that Old Colfeians had won 22-19 at Beckenham under the lights on Friday night, pushing Sutton and Epsom down to sixth place. In a keenly contested encounter at Rugby Lane, Sidcup came from behind to win 28-12 and, crucially, scored their fourth try on the final play to secure a bonus point that lifted them into pole position by virtue of a vastly superior points difference.

The recent number-nine hiatus for Sutton and Epsom was resolved with Euan Findlay making his league debut. There was also a welcome return for “the prodigal son” Josh Glanville, pulling on the colours for his first outing of the campaign. On the bench, crowd favourite Richard Madadangoma made his first appearance of the season. All Sutton and Epsom’s comings and goings paled into insignificance, however, alongside Sidcup prop Sam Carmen, who was making his 300th league appearance.

Before kick-off there was a tribute to Ben Searle, a member of the Sutton and Epsom physio team who tragically passed away following a battle with cancer. After the applause, Freddy Bunting set the game in motion with Sutton and Epsom attacking the clubhouse end.

Sutton and Epsom were hoping to reprise the outstanding performance that defeated Sidcup at Crescent Farm last season. The secret then was a fast start built on high-tempo rugby, rapid recycling and effective use of width. To their credit, the hosts put that plan into effect, dominating territory and possession in the opening exchanges.

Never has the old chestnut of taking penalty points reverberated louder around the stand. Four kickable penalties in front of the posts were declined in the first half. This was particularly notable given Sidcup possess the league’s best defensive record, conceding only 16 points per game. Yet this approach has been consistent all season, with Sutton and Epsom having converted only three penalty kicks despite amassing 460 points.

After a scoreless first quarter in which the Sidcup defence repeatedly repelled attacks that came agonisingly close, Sutton and Epsom finally broke through in the 25th minute. A sweeping move from halfway saw Tom Lennard break free on an inside line, Josh Rea time his support perfectly, and debutant Findlay finish with aplomb. Freddy Bunting’s conversion struck the upright, but the hosts led 5-0.

Ten minutes later Sidcup entered the Sutton and Epsom 22 for the first time and immediately made it count. A penalty kicked to the corner set up an attacking line-out and, after initial resistance, hooker Harry Large forced his way over. Josh Twyford converted impressively from the touchline to give the visitors a 7-5 lead.

Sutton and Epsom responded superbly and regained the lead before the interval. Sam Lennie made a trademark bulldozing break through midfield, Josh Rea again played a pivotal role, and Michael Bennion arrived at pace to sprint in from outside the 22 and score under the posts. Bunting added the extras to make it 12-7.

As first-half stoppage time approached, Sidcup produced their best passage of play, pressing hard for a second score. After excellent continuity, it appeared a try had been scored in the corner, but the ball was lost just short of the line. The half ended with the visitors in the ascendancy, though Sutton and Epsom had played some of their best rugby for a long while. Only time would tell whether they would rue not turning that dominance into more points.

Alex Lambe’s whistle began a finely balanced second half. Sidcup opened with a couple of uncharacteristic errors, but these proved brief. Five minutes in, Ben Stokes cut through the Sutton and Epsom defence, only to be denied by a timely intervention from Findlay. Shortly afterwards the visitors struck again. A perfectly timed pass on halfway released winger Seb Ellison, who kicked ahead, chased and gathered just ahead of the cover. Twyford converted from wide to put Sidcup 14-12 ahead.

Momentum now belonged to the men from Crescent Farm. Sidcup dominated possession, and Sutton and Epsom’s defensive resolve was tested relentlessly. That resistance held until the final quarter, when sustained pressure told. Captain Louis Keeley exploited the blindside, burst down the touchline and cut inside to score. Twyford’s conversion stretched the lead to 21-12.

As Sidcup turned the screw, Sutton and Epsom were further hampered by the injury-enforced departure of Josh Rea, who had produced an outstanding performance. The visitors hunted the bonus point, but the Rugby Lane men stood firm, holding Sidcup up over the line with ten minutes remaining.

With five minutes to play, Sutton and Epsom survived a stunning break, scrambling heroically before winning a relieving penalty. The match seemed set to conclude without bonus points. In the dying moments, however, an arm interfered with a Sutton and Epsom line-out jumper and a penalty was awarded. The Black and Whites opted for a long-range kick from near the touchline. Success would have earned a deserved bonus point. The kick drifted wide.

Sidcup counter-attacked from deep, moving the ball fluently before a long kick and eager chase forced a turnover. Hooker Harry Large, again in excellent support, gathered and ran in under the posts. Twyford added the conversion to complete a 28-12 victory and send Sidcup top of the league.

Sidcup’s second-half defence proved rather more durable than the Maginot Line, and Sutton and Epsom were unable to find a way through. Yet the hosts made their opponents work until the final seconds, and the first-half performance in particular should be the benchmark for the remainder of the season.

The league programme now pauses, with hostilities resuming on 31 January when Sutton and Epsom welcome Gravesend to Rugby Lane, having beaten them 29-12 away in October. High-flying Sidcup host local rivals Beckenham as they continue their push for promotion.

John Croysdill

Sutton and Epsom:
Bennion, Scott, Bibby, Bunting ©, Symonds, Lennard, O’Brien, Johnson, Lennie, Boaden, McTaggart, Duey, Rea, Jones, Hegarty.

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Replacements: Howes, Glanville, Madadangoma.

Sidcup:
Twyford, Ellison, Stokes, Smith, Keeley ©, Ubee, Ibrahim, Conlon, Large, Carmen, Stock, Romp, Koung, Healey, Caple.
Replacements: Watson, Knock, McMahon.

Photo – from previous fixture. Robin Kennedy

Seven-try storm sinks Epsom and Sutton

9 March 2026

Old Colfeians 44 Sutton & Epsom RFC 22. Saturday 10th January.

The fourth-placed Black & Whites opened their 2026 account at Horn Park against Old Colfeians, who sat one place below them in the league table. Sutton's season has been one of feast or famine — the ecstasy of winning their first four fixtures giving way to the agony of a five-match losing streak — although bonus points in defeat have kept them competitive. Whatever New Year resolutions were made, they did not translate into success on the pitch as Old Colfeians ran in seven tries in a 44–22 victory.

After a week of wild weather, conditions were benign, despite a temporary water cut in the area which thankfully was resolved in time for the teams to shower. There was an early sign of trouble when Sutton were pushed back at the first scrum, although this proved to be a rare moment of dominance by the home pack. Old Colfeians opened the scoring with a penalty from Ollie Burkett. Sutton responded five minutes later when Freddy Bunting kicked to the corner, Ewan McTaggart secured possession and after multiple phases Tom Lennard found winger Kyren Ghumra, who crossed for the opening try. The conversion struck the upright, but Sutton led 5–3.

The hosts soon hit back as centre Louis Baker broke through from 25 metres for the first of his two tries, regaining the lead at 8–5. Sutton replied immediately with what many present judged their try of the season — slick passing down the right wing released Ghumra for his second, nudging the visitors back in front at 10–8. The lead did not last long. A flowing counter-attack, started by full-back Chris Harris, ended with Mylo Mutongwizo finishing in the corner. Another missed conversion left Old Colfeians ahead 13–10.

Sutton pressed again but a sharp interception from Burkett turned defence into attack, leading to a try finished by prop Tom Rameaux. Burkett added the conversion for a 20–10 half-time lead in a fast-paced and entertaining contest.

Sutton were dealt a blow when scrum-half Gareth O'Brien was forced off with concussion, with Tom Lennard taking over his duties. The visitors made a strong start to the second half and were rewarded when McTaggart forced his way over from close range after another line-out move. Once again the conversion was missed, leaving Sutton trailing 20–15 with half an hour to play.

Although Sutton enjoyed spells of possession, Old Colfeians' defence was resolute. When the hosts regained territory, Harris kicked to the corner and the resulting catch-and-drive saw hooker Freddie Holland-Oliver score the bonus-point try. Burkett converted for 27–15 and the home forwards, led by captain Andy O'Malley, began to dominate. O'Malley powered over soon after, stretching the lead to 34–15.

Adam Bibby briefly reignited Sutton hopes with a strong run, but Baker then ran in from 40 metres for his second try to make it 39–15. Sutton did at least secure a valuable bonus point when Tom Lennard took a quick tap from a penalty near the line and Eric Duey emerged from the pile to score. Bunting converted to bring the score to 39–22.

Old Colfeians had the final word when O'Malley crossed again following another forward surge. Burkett missed the conversion but the hosts completed a convincing 44–22 win.

Sutton were very much in contention in the first half, but as the game wore on they were increasingly overpowered by a dominant Colfeians pack that laid the platform for victory. Both sides then enjoyed generous hospitality in the clubhouse, where Horn Park remains a favourite destination for travelling supporters.

Next Saturday Sutton return to Rugby Lane to face Sidcup, who won the reverse fixture 22–12 earlier in the season.

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

Old Colfeians

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Harris, Mutongwizo, Baker, Napper, Spaczil, Burkett, Wylie, Rameaux, Holland-Oliver, Agorioge, O'Malley ©, Collins-Oberman, Enskat, Walker & Amor.
Reps: Correa, Ramdhan & Storey.

John Croysdill

Image courtesy Robin Kennedy from a previous fixture.

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

9 March 2026

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

John Croysdill

Photo credit: Robin Kennedy

Late Penalty Breaks Epsom Hearts in 34–33 Thriller

9 March 2026

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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for.

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

With some irony, the referee then reduced the home side to 14 just as Sutton returned to a full complement. It appeared the Black & Whites had missed their chance when a harsh pass to Symonds resulted in a knock-on, but they were rescued by a colossal scrum effort that earned a penalty. Sutton camped on the line as Dartfordians' defence held firm, twice denying Lennie within inches of the line. From the drop-out, Sutton surged back again and were awarded a penalty in front of the posts. Declining the draw, they kicked to the corner, and from the line-out the pack ushered Lennie over. Bunting's kicking had been immaculate all afternoon, so it was a surprise when the conversion drifted narrowly wide, but Sutton led 33–31.

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

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

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

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

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

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

John Croysdill

Image – action from a previous fixture – Robin Kennedy

Epsom's Five Tries Not Enough to Halt Brighton Charge

9 March 2026

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Next Saturday Sutton & Epsom travel to Dartfordians, who they beat 33-29 at Rugby Lane back in September. The Black

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& Whites will be looking to start the return leg of the season with a win. Kick off 2pm at Horn Park. Meanwhile, Brighton host Battersea Ironsides with their lead extending to eight points following Sidcup's 29-31 home loss to Bromley.

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

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

John Croysdill

Photo credit: Robin Kennedy

A Canterbury tale of woe for Epsom's Rugby team

9 March 2026

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Sutton's inspiration came from Adam Bibby who chased a kick and made a thunderous tackle, forcing a penalty. Another infringement followed, placing Sutton deep in the Canterbury 22. The forwards controlled the drive and replacement Jack Howes touched down out wide. The missed conversion left Sutton ahead 26-25 with a bonus point secured. Canterbury had ten minutes to respond. Initially they fluffed their lines with an overthrown 5-metre lineout and then conceded a penalty. But third time proved lucky. A catch and drive moved them into the 22 before the backs swept into action. Collins improvised with a basketball chest pass that opened the field and Hewett raced clear to score in the corner. The conversion failed but the hosts led again, 30-26.

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

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

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

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

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

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

John Croysdill

Horsham hound Epsom's huddle

9 March 2026

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

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

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

Sutton's positive phases were repeatedly undermined by turnovers, lineout steals and determined Horsham defence. A

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rare scrum penalty for the hosts inside the 22 provided momentum and hooker Sam Lennie powered over from close range. The conversion drifted wide, leaving Sutton 10–14 behind.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

John Croysdill

Photo credit – Robin Kennedy

Batteresea stun Sutton & Epsom rugby

9 March 2026

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

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

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

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

Cameron Baker initiated proceedings on Garratt Green, a surface with deceptive declivities, on a day blessed with glorious sunshine and thankfully with no hint of rain at a venue offering no shelter for the loyal patrons. The first quarter implied that it might be one of those unfortunate afternoons for the Black & Whites. It included balls dropped by usually safe hands, promising openings that came to nought and penalties conceded for unwarranted verbosity with Mr Harry Hopkins that questioned his interpretation of the laws rather than any family connection to FDR's New Deal stalwart.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Next Saturday is free from league action and Sutton will endeavour to return to winning ways at Rugby Lane on Saturday

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22nd November when they host Horsham for the first time in a league encounter.

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

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

John Croysdill

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

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