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Battling Beckenham Take Sutton & Epsom RFC The Full Distance

27 October 2025



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

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

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

After ten minutes Beckenham enjoyed a period of total domination. The Sutton & Epsom defence was exceptional against robust carrying, grubber kicks and jinking backs. Unfortunately for the Black & Whites it ended like the Alamo rather than Mafeking. The ten-minute onslaught concluded with **George Bunton** squeezing into the corner. The fraternal failure to add the extras by **Lewis Bunton** did not diminish

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Beckenham's deserved 5-0 lead nearing the end of the first quarter. Moments later, misfortune struck the visitors as centre **Matt Lovell** was forced off through injury, stretching their resources even further in that position as winger **Fran Pennacchia** stepped up to the challenge.

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

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

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

The start of the second half made onlookers recall Laurel & Hardy, the Keystone Cops and Fred Karno's Army. **Rob Hegarty** was fortunately placed to purloin the ball on halfway. He walked back to connect with support but it was dislodged and kicked ahead. Sutton were in full retreat as Beckenham sprinted with optimism to the corner. The ball rolled free behind the S&E line and **Kyren Ghumra** decided to counter. He narrowly evaded a couple of tackles in his lateral run before seeking the far touch. His kick hit the upright and went straight to the opposition. The visitors added to the pandemonium by dropping the ball with the line at their mercy. Encouraged by that mayhem, moments later, number 8 **Andrew Knowles** kicked ahead once more and nearly manufactured a try.

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

Tom Boaden came on to replace try-scorer **Alex Mount** in the front row with the final quarter approaching. Beckenham responded positively to the setback and twice were frustrated by errant handling

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deep in the Sutton 22 as they put the hosts under the cosh. The exemplary Black & White defence spread across the park, tackled tenaciously and refused to take a step backwards. Having weathered the storm it was the Surrey side that secured the lead with their next visit to the Kent half. Another penalty was kicked to the 22. After the frustrations of earlier lineouts what followed was a catch and drive of pure perfection and the forwards marched over the line from 15 metres with hooker **Sam Lennie** scoring. The **Tom Lennard** conversion followed such a bizarre path that the ball might have been remotely controlled as it meandered over the posts for a 19-12 lead.

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

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

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

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

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

John Croysdill

Image from a previous fixture. – credit Robin Kennedy

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