

Cards and casualties consign Sutton & Epsom to defeat

12 October 2026



Medway 24 Sutton & Epsom 7 Saturday 10th October

Sutton & Epsom have only had three league visits to Priestfields. The first encounter in 2016 saw an Andy Matthews hat-trick secure promotion for the Black & Whites from the old London One South. On their last trip, Sutton & Epsom had an abundant advantage of 26 points overhauled by a marauding Medway team.

Last season the hosts were most unfortunate to be relegated on points difference from Level 5 and are naturally looking for a return to Regional 1 at the earliest possible opportunity.

With both clubs enjoying a perfect start to the new campaign, garnering maximum points, it was all set to be a fair measure of both sides' credentials for the season to come. Medway's 24-7 triumph maintained their perfect record.

Sutton & Epsom played with the slope in the first period and opened their account in the third minute. A dazzling break, synonymous with Adam Bibby's play, jinked through the defence and hooker Sam Lennie was in support to cross the whitewash. Freddy Bunting slotted over the conversion for a most encouraging 7-0 score for the visitors.

Unfortunately for Sutton & Epsom it became a case of one step forward and two or three back as they accumulated penalties for multiple offences.

On the quarter-hour Medway equalised. After sustained pressure, powerful lock Peter Cole, stationed on the touchline, received the ball a few metres out and forced his way over before running around to improve the angle for the conversion. A grateful Owen Church-Mills obliged and made it 7-7.

Soon after the restart Sutton & Epsom lost Angus Findlay to a yellow card as the weight of penalties became too much for the referee to bear. Reduced to 14 men, Medway took advantage with a sweeping attack.

Then, to the dismay of the travelling Rugby Lane supporters, Freddy Bunting was given a yellow card for a no-arms tackle in the corner. Sutton & Epsom were now very much unlucky 13.

The Priestfields crowd were soon applauding the lead. The Men of Kent - or Kentish Men, depending on their geographical disposition - scored through a driving maul as lock Peter Cole collected his second try of the afternoon. Owen Church-Mills added another conversion for 14-7.

Rather than meekly folding in adversity, Sutton & Epsom stiffened their resolve and took the attack to Medway. There was to be no fairytale ending as they were halted on the line. It was to the visitors' considerable credit that they did not concede another point while suffering their numerical deficiencies.

Then, just when the Black & Whites thought they could return to normal, they lost full-back Michael Bennion to an ankle injury. Joe Lovatt came off the bench to play at scrum-half as Sutton & Epsom amended the back division, with Euan Findlay switching to 15.

The remainder of the half continued as powerful tackling subdued attacking intent. For Sutton & Epsom, Tipene Maxwell made his first start in his familiar position at 12 and reminded supporters of yesteryear of James Faaatuatu, whose bone-shaking tackling enlivened Rugby Lane ten years ago.

The first period ended with Medway leading 14-7 and all the players grateful for a breather after a very physical half.

The crowd at Priestfields were witnessing the type of match one would anticipate from two unbeaten teams. With the home team having the advantage of the slope for the second half they were marginal favourites, but Sutton & Epsom had shown enough attacking intent to keep the match in the balance.

The start of the second half reflected the closeness of the contest and was patchy as both sides battled for supremacy. Sutton & Epsom were perhaps guilty of trying to force plays, but that was the result of the parsimonious Medway defence, which robustly stood its ground.

The third quarter proved to be a stop-start affair that ended with more misfortune for the visitors. Joe Lovatt was forced from the field having suffered a broken nose. This was most untimely for the scrum-half as he is about to get married.

Once more the coaches scratched their heads to reorganise their backs. It was not quite shuffling deckchairs on the Titanic, as Josh Rea has often slipped into the backs, but the situation was far from ideal. Pete Gordon came off the bench

to play in the back row.

With 15 minutes left on the clock, the Kent club got some breathing space with their third try of the afternoon. Gaining possession from a loose ball near halfway after a Sutton & Epsom scrum, they progressed to the Black & White 22.

Following several phases, the ball came to John Sipawa and the prolific wing scored in his trademark style. Though the conversion failed, the hosts had a two-score advantage, leading 19-7.

If onlookers thought that might have knocked the stuffing out of the visitors they were very much mistaken, as Sutton & Epsom took the game to their opponents.

The Black & Whites threw themselves into attack mode as they went in search of points. They could not translate possession, territory and phases into points. Each half-break urged on by their supporters was met by scrambling cover. Greater risks were being taken in order to find a solution.

It was met with a cruel final nail in the coffin in added time. Pressing in the Medway 22, winger Perry Macauley picked off a pass and set off for glory. As the cover came and, 35 metres out, he weaved to avoid the tacklers and spotted support to his right.

Impressively, it was the mountainous figure of Peter Cole who set off after the kick ahead. He was rewarded for his heroic support run as he reached the ball first to complete his hat-trick – a rare accomplishment for a lock forward – as Medway led 24-7.

It is always a pleasure to see one of the engine room of the pack, the perennial unsung heroes, have their moment in the spotlight.

Shortly afterwards the final whistle concluded this hard-fought encounter. The Black & Whites were rather more black and blue, but in defeat they should find a great deal of solace in their spirit, unity to the cause and resilience in adversity.

Medway remain unbeaten with maximum points, with only Beckenham ahead of them in the table. The hosts' defence was tireless while Peter Cole gained the plaudits.

Finally, a special note of thanks to Gareth O'Brien who, despite being a late injury withdrawal, demonstrated the qualities of the "good club man". He not only travelled to the game but also took on the commentary duties as "Junior JC".

Next Saturday the Black & Whites' charabanc heads to the Warman Sports Club. Without the pitch priority given over to the cricketers, as was the case last season, they will play Bromley on their main pitch.

The Kent club have started the campaign with wins over the Ironsides, Dartfordians and Hammersmith & Fulham to sit fourth in the table, compared with Sutton & Epsom's fifth position.

Sutton & Epsom: Bennion, Scott, Bibby, Maxwell, Findlay A, Bunting, Findlay E, Johnson, Lennie, Boaden, McTaggart, Glanville, Rea, Jones & Hegarty (c). Reps: Duey, Gordon & Lovatt.

Medway: McNamara, Macauley, Bullock, Clement, Sipawa, Church-Mills, Hyde, Nickalls, Knight, Miles, Cole, Kenny, Cauldwell, Wilson & Wickham. Reps: Fuller, Ross & Hearn.

Image from previous fixture. Credit Robin Kennedy