

Sutton & Epsom Come Back Victorious

11 November 2024

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

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

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

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

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

The previous round they defeated a defiant Old Tiffinians who came close to overturning the deficit. Could Sutton do better or would it be a repeat of their Old Tiffinians experience on their last away day outing? The Black & Whites had the perfect start to the second

period. Playing at a high tempo the forwards swarmed into the 22 and were awarded a penalty. The visitors threatened the line before providing Tom Lennard with the ball. The Sutton 10 then made a bid for the highest pass above pitch level in Sutton history as the ball ballooned towards the touchline. Groans turned to cheers as it was held and flipped inside for Matt Symonds to score his first try for the senior side. Freddy Bunting converted from the flank and Sutton trailed 10-23.

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

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

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

This was a commendable Sutton comeback from 18 points down made more impressive because it was on the road. Injuries obviously assisted S&E but their second half showing had already hinted at the triumph to come. For Dartfordians a couple of missed opportunities in the first half ultimately proved costly. Rugby Lane will host the

next league fixture and Thurrock will be the visitors. In contrast to the last two visitors, Sidcup and Medway, who arrived as league leaders the Essex club have had a tough baptism to this league and are bottom of the table and still searching for a first win.

Sutton & Epsom
Findlay, Huie, Bibby, Bunting ©, Symonds, Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Boaden, Hilton, Tame, McTaggart, Jones, Davies & Hegarty.
Replacements: Gibson, Gerhard & Baker.

Dartfordians
Cappuccio, Nissinen-Le, Soler-Gomez, Taylor J, Adams, Hetherington, Taylor P, Rackley, Hooban, Chapman, Potter, Faulkes, Williams, Wright & Chandler.
Replacements: Tuffley, Heylen & Brent.

Miracle with Medway

11 November 2024



For the hosts it was a Saturday of availability Armageddon with an injury list mounting that targeted the front and back rows. Players of yesteryear were called to arms and the 2nd XV was ransacked as such resources would have been familiar to Old Mother Hubbard. Jac Davies was the only debutant as the scrum half pitched in as an open-side flanker. In contrast, Medway who have enjoyed a remarkable consistency in selection, with their sizeable travelling support from Priestfields, looked forward to another showing of “The Usual Suspects”. To add to the task the Kent side topped the table having only lost their opening game of the campaign. Confounding all expectations Sutton & Epsom, for the second match in a row at Rugby Lane, lowered the colours of the league leaders to be victorious by 22-18. On an overcast but still afternoon that hinted at future rain Freddy Bunting kicked off towards the Cabbage Patch. Understandably confident from their five game winning streak the visitors were immediately on the attack. The eponymous Bullock charged down the paddock from his own 22. Passes were interchanged and a dramatic opening score was denied by the scrambling defence in the S&E 22. Sutton were also lively in the opening exchanges and after five minutes they were awarded a kickable penalty. In a tactical shift of tectonic proportions Freddy Bunting went for goal and put his team 3-0 up.

This minor irritation did not derail the Medway machine as they stormed into action. The closer to the line they got the harder the hosts tackled. The ball was spun wide and a try looked probable. The visitors employed that popular rugby elision, the long miss pass, that was met by that familiar foe, the interception. Adam Bibby set off for glory eliciting roars of encouragement as he sped past the grandstand. Frantic defenders closed in from all angles and brought him down ten metres short. However, Mr Richardson’s whistle offered the consolation of a second penalty. With ten minutes on the clock Freddy Bunting doubled the advantage to 6-0. Five minutes later, another indiscretion, another penalty and another Bunting three points for 9-0.

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

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

The lineout was overthrown and eager Sutton hands gathered the ball. Replacement prop Richard Madadangoma rampaged forward before the backs were released. Slick hands and accurate passing was rewarded as fullback Austin Bell timed his entry into the line to perfection to score. Freddy Bunting converted from the flank and S&E led 16-3. Medway went in search of a score before the break. A neat lineout move thrown to the front man tried to catch Sutton napping but it came to nought. Soon afterwards there was another penalty to the Black & Whites followed by a stern lecture to Medway lock Peter Cole. The first half ended without any further additions to the scoreboard. The teams turned around with S&E leading 16-3. The makeshift Sutton & Epsom XV were on course for a major upset but everyone at Rugby Lane was expecting more of the same in the second half, relentless Medway pressure. Both sides gathered in a huddle unleashing a primal scream and prepared for battle in the second period.

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

Moments later Medway conceded yet another kickable penalty and Freddy Bunting obliged with three more points for 19-8. The visitors' frustration with the arbiter of truth and justice overflowed and a couple of minutes later a vocal objection to a decision from Mr Richardson led to an additional 10-metre stroll for the defenders. Once more Captain Bunting tested his kicking powers and again it fell short and the game restarted with a 22 drop out. The game entered the final quarter and ominously for the home supporters Medway scored their second try. Excellent support play was rewarded as Harrison Fermor was on hand to score in the corner despite the desperate defence. The 15 was unable to add the extras to his try but his side at 13-19 were within a score with plenty of time left on the clock. The Black & White defence girded their collective loins and continued to tackle ferociously and win vital turnovers. Additionally the pack were causing Medway problems at the scrum. Another blast of the whistle, another penalty near halfway and another shot at goal for Sutton. These penalties may not have impacted the scoreboard but they frustrated the visitors, took vital time off the clock and made them initiate their attacks from their own

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

Medway now threw the entire contents of the kitchen at the Sutton defences. John Sipawa was greeted by three tacklers and bundled into touch. Jac Davies made a wonderful cover tackle as a line break was extinguished. Every phase repelled ate into the clock until the final play. The Kent side were rewarded with a Max Bullock try in the corner and a bonus point but a delighted S&E side knew that the conversion would be followed by the final whistle. The kick failed and the joyous celebrations began for an outstanding 22-18 victory.

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

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

Replacements: Madadangoma, Williams & Baker.

Medway

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

Replacements: Hyde J, Hyde N & Reeves.

Old Tiffinians 41 Sutton & Epsom RFC 19

11 November 2024

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

Free from rain, bathed in sunshine and with a gentle breeze upon an immaculate surface the scene was set for a captivating afternoon's entertainment as Freddy Bunting kicked off. The opening Sutton salvoes were quashed by forthright tackling by everyone in an OT shirt as the visitors looked to spread the ball wide to their wings. After ten minutes the Old Boys demonstrated their best phases and enjoyed the bonus of a penalty in the 22. As is the modern vogue they kicked to the corner. Their positive approach was rewarded with a perfectly executed catch and drive from the 5-metre lineout that ushered prop Ross Hobbs over the whitewash for the first try of the afternoon. Though the extras were not added the hosts led 5-0. The OTs were soon on the attack again and assisted by S&E transgressions. Their second entry in the visitors' 22 would result in their second try. Unfortunately, Sutton hooker Peter Gordon had to be replaced by Ben Green after a clash of heads in a try-saving double tackle. On the resumption Tiffinians pressed hard and fine handling saw fullback Max Talman score in the corner and double the lead to 10-0 at the end of the first quarter. S&E responded swiftly to the second score. Like their opponents a kickable penalty was discarded for the greedier option. The Rugby Lane Number 8 Rob Hegarty forced his way over in the corner from the remorseless march of the catch and drive. Freddy Bunting's touchline effort drifted by the uprights as his newly awakened team trailed 5-10. Sutton had shuffled the pack to line up with a front row triumvirate of debutant replacement Dan Johnson, Tom Boaden took over the hooking duties and Callum Hilton. Though this combination is far from the Black & Whites first choice they performed impressively providing a steady platform and did not take a backward step in the set piece. Five minutes later the visitors had a wonderful opportunity to level the scores after a Tom Lennard break but, as would be the case too often during this entertaining encounter, the ball out to the flank was not gathered.

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

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

restart handed the initiative to the Tiffinians who set out their stall in the S&E 22. Three phases later and winger Seb Sabania was bursting through tacklers to score. Sharif Dougramaji’s sweetly struck conversion added to the demoralising impact of the rapid retort to restore the margin to 12 points at 24-12.

The omens continued to point to a home victory. Another Sutton free ball could not rekindle the earlier magic. A kickable penalty was declined and a lineout in the corner was not found. Then the most deflating moment of all was Seb Sabania picking off an interception and running back a fifth try, and his second, from halfway. Sharif Dougramaji accepted the salubrious offering for a 31-12 advantage with a dozen minutes having elapsed in the second period. To epitomise the Sutton decline the restart failed to go ten metres. However, despair was transformed into hope as the pack won a penalty at the set piece. Naturally, the Black & Whites took off lickety-split and were soon in the opposition 22. OT’s scrambling defence not only picked off an interception but countered through an enormous clearance kick. Alfie Baker’s cover was immediately undermined by fellow wing Arun Watkin’s injudicious counter. Sutton were fortunate to escape as Sir reversed a penalty under their posts. The game was now very open and tries at either end were a probability rather than a possibility. Sutton benefited from a magnificent 50 22 from Tom Lennard to set up their next attack. The home defence rebuffed a couple of sorties before Austin Bell’s grubber nestled under the posts. The scuttling full back arrived with the cover and his attempt to nudge the ball forward was viewed as dangerous play as he made contact with the defender who had stoically fallen on the loose ball. This was the first of a string of penalties that throttled potential attacks for both XVs. The next score came from that reliable and fertile source: the penalty kicked to the corner. It was S&E’s turn to demonstrate their catch and drive efficiency with flanker Dan Jones the beneficiary. The Bunting boot made it a two-score game at 19-31. Old Tiffinians set out to restore their supremacy and a bullocking Sabania run hinted at his hat trick before he was eventually forced to pass inside but the ball was knocked on. Sutton cleared their lines but were soon under the cosh. Josh Glanville received a yellow card endeavouring to turn over the ball. Very sensibly Sharif Dougramaji opted for the kick for goal adjacent to the uprights. The successful kick meant that the hosts led 34-19 with three minutes of regular time left. Not so much as a comfortable points’ cushion but more like a massive beanbag occupying most of a living room floor. The contest was over. In time added on Old Tiffinians added an extra layer of gloss to their fine performance. They kicked into the corner for the 5-metre lineout. The unstoppable juggernaut advanced ever onwards and Ross Hobbs collected his second catch and drive try. Sharif Dougramaji celebrated the victory with the conversion and Mr Pryor ended the match with the home team triumphant by 41-19

A week is a long time in politics but it must seem like an eternity for the Rugby Lane faithful as this performance bore no resemblance to their Sidcup success. However, the most significant factor was the quality of the Old Tiffinian performance. Their forwards carried aggressively and effectively with Ross Hobbs and Robert Myddelton in the vanguard. Their defence offered Sutton neither time nor space. When they got to the 22 they were clinical whether with the catch and drive or handling in the backs. The pace and power of Seb Sabania gained the plaudits with a brace of tries in a thoroughly deserved bonus point victory. The Black & Whites created opportunities out wide but poor passing handicapped their progress on numerous occasions. Sutton & Epsom will lick their wounds and look forward to the visit of league leaders Medway to Rugby Lane. Meanwhile the Old Tiffinians departed their Clubhouse to descend upon the 18:24 to Waterloo and serenade the passengers on their way to a night of celebrations.

Sutton & Epsom
Bell, Watkins, Scott, Bunting ©, Baker, Lennard, Munford, Boaden, Gordon, Hilton, Glanville, Tame, Rea, Jones & Hegarty.
Replacements: Johnson, Green & Findlay.

Old Tiffinians
Talman, Segun, Dougramaji, Fawcett, Sabanaia, Taylor, Fowler, Hobbs, Howard-Clarke, Turner, O’Connell, Noeh, Myddelton, Graham & Marshall.
Replacements: Corcoran, Dore & Freeman.

Sutton & Epsom Rugby beat the unbeaten

11 November 2024



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

Freddy Bunting got the ball rolling as Sutton played towards the clubhouse with the permanent threat of rain. The early exchanges ceded little territory before a wonderful kick from Josh Twyford angled into the home 22. The hosts responded with two bone-shaking tackles from Ben Tame, that set the tone for an afternoon not for the fainthearted, and a fine kick from Gareth O’Brien cleared their lines. The ferocity of the tackling and a slippery ball hindered the attacking

pro prowess of both XVs. Kiwi Josh Rea demonstrated his talent with a brace of tackles followed by a fine break, Bunting probed with the boot and Sutton attempted to prise open the visitors’ well organised and aggressive defence. The first genuine chance came on the quarter hour when Austin Bell kicked ahead and the covering Seb Ellison was caught as he attempted to run from his line. However, in the ensuing frenetic melee the referee awarded Sidcup a scrum for a knock on. The game continued with great pace whilst thunderous tackling from both defences held the upper hand as time after time ball-carriers were unceremoniously dumped onto their posteriors. With the half hour approaching Josh Twyford perfectly placed kicked settled irritatingly just outside the Sutton 22 and a hesitant Bell, now at 15 after an injury to Gareth O’Brien, kicked out on the full. The visitors failed to prosper as their lineout faltered. From a Sutton scrum Rob Hegarty ducked, weaved and evaded tacklers before offloading to the galloping Glanville who burst to halfway where, as ever, Dan Jones was in support. The ubiquitous flanker set off on one of his increasingly familiar runs and was finally halted by the swarming Sidcup defence in their 22. Sadly this exhilarating attack ended as a pass was delivered to a man who was more trying to get out of the way than storm forward.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sutton & Epsom

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

Replacements: Hilton, Green & Findlay.

Sidcup

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

Replacements: Conlon, Williams & Pooley.

Image courtesy Robin Kennedy

Rare rugby draw for Epsom side

11 November 2024



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

A year ago the 2023-4 Ironsides vintage were on top of the table having opened their account with 80 points against Gravesend and followed that up with bonus point wins over Sidcup and the Cornish. This current Battersea brew have been battle hardened and forged into steel by a trio of nail-biting finishes. Unbeaten at Garratt Green with a one-point and a three-point victory over Thurrock and Beckenham but bettered by three on the road at Reeds Weybridge. For the high scoring visitors it was a case of wanting to return to winning ways. At the final whistle, after a gripping match, the sides could not be separated as the scoreboard read 19-19. Players and spectators alike palavered peacefully onwards into the unclouded jollity of the afternoon. Sutton with the slope and the wind in their favour were unleashed by Freddy Bunting's perfectly flighted kick off. The first foray to the Battersea 22 was led by Ewan McTaggart who is fast becoming a most prominent feature in the S&E pack. The lock forward might be lacking in steatopygia, that comforting feature for Number 8s of yesteryear, but he makes up for that deficiency with his athleticism around the park. In reply a penalty and subsequent lineout provided the hosts with their first attacking platform. Outside centre Charles Jacobs' break was supported by hooker Oliver Lewis before Jacobs carried again. Battersea spun it wide and looked favourites to score in the corner but a wonderful covering tackle by captain Bunting led to a hopeful offload inside which was poached by Gareth O'Brien who was felled by a high tackle. It would not be the only occasion that the Black & White line under severe pressure would be relieved by the impatient hosts conceding a costly penalty.

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

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

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

22. As the forwards wrestled for supremacy, the commitment, intensity of carrying and tackling was ratcheted up another notch by both packs. Equally the back divisions marshalled their defences as both XV's went in search for the vital opening score of the half. After 15 minutes it took an astutely angled grubber from Freddy Bunting that bounced up perfectly for winger Austin Bell to break the deadlock. It was a classic example of sporting vision, that priceless ability to see in a split second what others do not in order to create the sublime moment. A majestic touchline conversion by Bunting bisected the uprights and S&E led 13-7. Sutton held the upper hand for five minutes. The Ironsides forced S&E to their line with a probing kick forcing a lineout ten metres out. Clean ball and a well executed catch and drive saw the hosts trundle irresistibly over the line for their second try. Trailing by a solitary point Charles Stuart's conversation oversaw the restoration of their lead by 14-13. As is so often the case the opposition were given an early opportunity with a penalty from the restart. The Black & Whites owed their chance for the lead to a thunderous tackle from flanker Ben Tame. There was a moment of confusion when the height of the Bunting kick exceeded the diminutive stature of the Battersea uprights but Sutton & Epsom now inched ahead by 16-14. Perhaps distracted by that uncertainty the restart sailed out on the full and Sutton scrummaged on halfway. Moments later there was another indication of the tension telling. An Ironside queried Mr Howe's interpretation of the laws in a tone that was not appreciated and the referee ushered the defenders 10 metres back. If loose lips sink ships then loquacious rugby players cost three points. Freddy Bunting added a fourth penalty to his tally for Sutton to lead 19-14 with a dozen minutes to go plus the extras for stoppages. Battersea now went in search of points. Their first sortie was cut short when they lost possession on the Sutton 22 and Austin Bell cleared magnificently to the opponent's half. S&E were on the attack but were thwarted by a Charles Stuart interception and kick that rolled into

their 22. Austin Bell covered well to secure the ball on the deck and the Black & Whites were gifted a penalty as a chasing Ironside naively fell on the prostrate Bell. As the game entered time added on it was one-way traffic in favour of Battersea. The visitors were magnificent in defence and thought they had earned a turnover but the hosts were awarded the scrum. Closer and closer the Garratt Park pack advanced to the posts. Avoiding the risk of being held up over the line, with admirable patience under the circumstances, they finally forced their way over by the right hand upright. 19 all and the conversion was a mere formality for a kicker of Stuart’s stature. However, Charles Stuart, endured the type of unexpected misfortune that would have been familiar to not only Aeschylus but also his historical namesake as the conversion was missed. Shortly afterwards the referee concluded proceedings and the sides shared the points for a 19-19 draw. It was a fitting result for two teams that had given their all. For Sutton Ben Green’s performance off the bench was redolent of Ed Burton at Guildford in 2015. Green’s previous contributions had been predominantly inconsequential minutes off the bench but he revelled in the opportunity at a serious stint at Number 8. He carried with aggression, tackled powerfully and symbolised an outstanding effort by the Sutton pack. No doubt this Battersea side will be contenders for promotion again this season as they have quality in all departments. The league now takes a week off and the action returns to Rugby Lane when league leaders Sidcup visit on 12 th October. What a difference a year makes, on their last trip in November 2023 they arrived bottom of the league and level on points with Sutton & Epsom with both clubs having only a solitary win to their names in seven outings.

Sutton & Epsom
O’Brien, Watkins, Scott, Elliott, Bell, Bunting ©, Munford, Mount, Gordon, Boaden, Glanville, McTaggart, Tame, Jones & Whitaker.
Replacements: Gibson, Green & Unused: Symonds.

Battersea Ironsides
Baker, Magee, Jacobs, Roberts, Craig, Stuart, Barnard, Chetwynd, Lewis, Batstone, MacPherson, Walton, Dollard, Chitan & Martin.
Replacements: Borup, Humphris & Diamond.

Sutton & Epsom Denied at the Death in Epic Encounter

11 November 2024



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

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

It was a superbly sunny Saturday, firm under foot with a refreshing breeze and all was set fair for entertaining running rugby and these two sides did not disappoint. The visitors dominated the early exchanges including their front row winning a penalty at the first scrum. In customary fashion the front row offender demonstrated his prelapsarian innocence with a look of amazement at having been penalised. With tenacious defence OR were denied. It was frustrating for Sutton that their first possession in the backs culminated in an interception near halfway and Harrison Mitchell running in the opening try that was unconverted for a 5-0 Reigatian lead. After the restart Adam Bibby’s reward for his excellent chase and tackle was a twisted ankle and being replaced by Lawrence Elliott for the remaining 70 minutes.

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

As is frequently witnessed at every level of the game the restart is a vulnerable time for the team that has just scored. The Black & Whites secured the ball and seemed to have avoided the fatal error only to concede a penalty on their second sortie. Tom Baldwin made it four from four to level the score at 17-17. Neither side were content to just play out the first period with parity and audaciously tried to wrest the advantage from the other. Despite the endeavours of all concerned

there was no addition to the score and the sides turned around level, 17-17. It had been a commendable effort by Sutton to shackle the Old Reigatian team and restrict them to one try and they now had the elements in their favour for the second period.

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

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

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

Sutton & Epsom
O’Brien, Watkins, Scott, Bibby, Huie, Bunting ©, Munford, Mount, Gordon, Boaden, Glanville, McTaggart, Rea, Jones & Whitaker.
Replacements: Hilton, Green & Elliott.

Old Reigatian
Woodford, Mitchell, Allen, Baldwin, Coyle, Holder, Skinner, Monk, Nestor, Collister, Jones, Franklin-Talbot, Brooks, Goldsmith & Travers.
Replacements: Lee, Courteney-Walker & Parker.

Photo: Robin Kennedy

Blue sky sees Black and Whites in the red

11 November 2024



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

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

Australian Friday night to forget in Cardiff and was absent. After a keenly contested encounter Beckenham deserved the honours with a bonus point victory by 29-14.

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

Excellent pressure from the Black & Whites at the restart gave them an advantageous lineout on the host's 22. The scenario improved when Beckenham conceded a penalty that was kicked into the corner. Initially the Kent forwards splendidly drove back the Surrey pack. However, a secondary Sutton surge saw the visiting forwards advance towards the line. Then play was halted by the shrill blast of the whistle and the referee not only awarded Sutton & Epsom a penalty try but also he flourished a yellow card to captain Richard O'Keefe to reduce the host's, who now trailed 7-5, to 14 men. The Balmoral Avenue men made light of the numerical deficiency and soon regained the lead. S&E failed to deal with a bobbling ball near their 22. From the scrum the home team struck down the flank with an arcing run followed by an inside pass to scrum half Craig Thomson who went through untouched to score. Lewis Bunton's successful strike concluded the first half with Beckenham leading 12-7 despite the wind and being a player down on the naughty step.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Replacements: Boaden, Hilton, & Munford.

Beckenham

Kennedy, Lovell, J. Caddy, L. Caddy, Jordan, Bunton, Thomson, Baker, Willden, Richards,

Latouche, Moran, Keefe ©, Stapleton & Knowles.
Replacements: Hatfield, Bernard-Moore & Feldhaus-Davies.

Sutton and Epsom Rugby off to a flying-start

11 November 2024



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There was an air of almost uncomfortable optimism before the kick-off at Rugby Lane, as pre-season had gone well, and there was evident intensity in defence and improved continuity between the forwards and backs. Lest one forget, S&E had conceded an uncomfortable 598 points last league campaign, and as the legendary coach of the University of Alabama football team, Bear Bryant, wisely stated: "Offence wins games... defence wins championships." However, few would have expected Sutton to break two all-time league records. Not only did they eclipse their previous points total of 49 against Bedford Athletic in 2018 by scoring 50, but they also surpassed the 31-point winning margin of their 2005 45-14 thrashing of Gosport & Fareham. What was most impressive was that the Black & Whites had integrated numerous new combinations at half-back and in the centres, with a debutant hooker in Pete Gordon. For a delighted coaching staff, this performance must bode well for the rest of the season. For the unfortunate Old Colfeians, it was one of those days where things simply did not go right. The first game of the season should never be a barometer for the whole fixture list, as numerous hurdles, from weddings to injuries, can distort the true picture.

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

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

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

Photo credit: Robin Kennedy

A cloud followed by silver for Old Glyntonians

11 November 2024



Old Glynionians are the new holders of the Papa Johns Community Cup Counties 3 South Shield, having overcome Cranleigh in a thrilling 22-21 victory on Sunday 12th May.

After an emotional minute’s silence was held in honour of former Old Glynionians player **Ben Rollinson**, who sadly died aged just 42 last Friday, Glyn started with a fire in their belly and scored two early tries to take a 10-0 lead within the first 20 minutes, but the next 60 minutes would not be as straightforward.

Cranleigh responded with two converted scores to lead 10-14 and appeared to be heading towards half-time full of confidence, but OGs captain Tim Laughton-Scott crashed over the whitewash in the last play of the half to restore the Epsom & Ewell-based side’s lead.

With temperatures rising to an annual peak of 25c down at Shaftesbury Park in Bristol, home of the Bristol Bears Women, and just a point separating the teams at 15-14, everything was set for an exhausting second 40.

Five minutes into the second half, Man of the Match Michael Hume showed speed, power and calm to break through the Cranleigh defence and juggle a back-and-fourth pass with his fellow centre before dotting down to extend Old Glynionians’ lead. The try was converted by fly-half Sam Smith to make the score 22-14.

And that kick that would prove the difference between glory and gut-wrenching defeat, as 35 minutes of gruelling Glyn defence was finally broken by Cranleigh who got over the line to make it 22-21. But as the Crane’s conversion sailed through the sticks, the full-time whistle was blown. The match would end 22-21 in favour of the Old Glynionians.

The 2024 Papa Johns Community Cup Counties 3 South Shield now sits alongside three Surrey Bowls (2008, ’09, ’12) in the Old Glynionians trophy cabinet.

James McFarlane, Chairman of Old Glynionians RFC, said: “Firstly, huge credit has to go to Cranleigh. They have given us one of the hardest-fought games I can ever remember. The one-point winning margin is a fair representation of how tight the game was and how well-matched the sides were, so they should also be proud of their performance.

“Winning this competition is hugely satisfying. There are so many people that have been mucking in both on and off the pitch for so many years, and now it all feels worth it.”

Tim Laughton-Scott, Captain of Old Glynionians RFC, said: “We really had to dig deep out there to win this, so it feels like a very sweet victory. We knew we could do it, but when the score flipped against us in the first half, it tested our belief for sure. We stuck to our game, fought bravely on what was an exhausting day under the sun, and just about came away on top.

“I never expected to be picking up silverware in my first season as captain, but the support from the players and the backroom staff has been great. It’s a big win for everyone involved.”

James Kennedy-Myers, Head Coach of Old Glynionians RFC, said: “I didn’t play but I’m still exhausted! To win our first trophy in over decade and to do it less than 48 hours after the devastating loss of a former player stirs up so many emotions. Rollo [Ben Rollinson] was a great friend of mine, and this win will be well and truly dedicated to him.

“I’m thrilled with the squad that we have, probably our strongest ever, and look forward to defending our crown next season.”

Image: Old Glynionians lift the Papa Johns Community Cup. credit Lisa Banning/Old Glynionians

Old Glynionians silver chance in a decade

11 November 2024



Epsom & Ewell-based Old Glynionians RFC will take a team bus to Bristol this Sunday 12th May to contest the Papa Johns Community Cup Counties 3 South Shield Final.

The side, formed in 2007 by former Glyn School students and still made-up of a number of alumni, will face fellow Surrey side Cranleigh, having dismissed Streatham-Croydon RFC and King’s College Hospital in the quarter-final and semi-final respectively.

This will be the ‘Ogs’ first final since 2012, where they saw off Merton to win the Surrey Bowl, a competition they also won in 2008 and 2009.

James McFarlane, Chairman of Old Glynionians RFC, said: “Less than two years ago we were finding our feet again after a COVID-interrupted year or two of on-and-off rugby, so to be heading to a cup final with arguably our strongest ever squad is testament to all the hard work put by so many people at the club.

We’d like to thank The Rising Sun in Epsom, our home pub and clubhouse, for their hospitality this season, our brilliant sponsors, Radford & Sons Butchers in Stoneleigh, without them we wouldn’t have any new kit or quality food for out BBQ social events, as well as the brilliant City Skills. Thanks also to Glyn School for continuing to let us use the facilities. Fingers crossed the boys can get the job done on Sunday”

Tim Laughton-Scott, Captain of Old Glynionians RFC, said: “Things have really started to click this year. We had a mixed bag of results earlier in the winter, but as the players have gelled, confidence levels have grown and I’ve got a lot of faith in the team going down to Bristol on Sunday. Funnily enough, we’ve only recently come off our end-of-season tour to Amsterdam, but we all came home in one piece and everyone should be in good shape for the game.”

James Kennedy-Myers, Head Coach of Old Glynionians RFC, said: “The boys have already achieved great things this season, including a club-record 10 league wins, and things really have gone from strength-to-strength over the last few months.

“If we turn up with the same energy and commitment we’ve shown in the previous two rounds of this competition, then there’s every chance we can lift the cup.”

The match will take place at Shaftesbury Park, the home of Bristol Bears Women and will kick off at 11am.