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London Calling Time with a Sutton & Epsom Win

9 April 2024

Sutton & Epsom RFC 12 Reeds Weybridge 10. Saturday 6th April.

As is the format of league rugby the fixtures conclude by playing the opposition first encountered on the opening day of the campaign. On that September afternoon bathed in glorious sunshine but disrupted by Rugby World Cup absentees, of the carousing rather than playing variety, Reeds Weybridge gained a 27-12 success. With both teams secure in the knowledge that they had retained their Regional 2 South East status for next time one might have expected a high-scoring denouement to the campaign. In the end the teams created a Sutton & Epsom league record as the Black & Whites edged the contest 12-10 so recording the lowest aggregate ever for the last game of the season undercutting the 1995 classic when S&E won 13-11 at Ealing.

It was a red-letter day for George London as the veteran, but not balding, back row made his 200th league appearance for the 1 st XV transforming the ‘Fab Four’ into the ‘Famous Five’ of players to have reached that landmark. The match was played with the handicap, or advantage, of a howling wind arrowing towards the corner flag at the clubhouse end. Reeds Weybridge kicked off with the elements against them. At once the significance of the gale was demonstrated as Tom Lennard cleared from his 22 to the opposition 22. If that was not harsh enough it was a 50/22 and Sutton were awarded the lineout.

This initiated a ten-minute siege of the Reeds line. The throw in was secured, the forwards advanced and a penalty was indicated as a speculative ball descended from the heavens onto the wings. The defenders saved the day but returned for more punishment. The penalty was kicked to the corner, McTaggart rose skywards to gather and initiate the second assault. Three carries and a penalty and the same dose of medicine was repeated. This time the referee issued a yellow card and Sutton & Epsom pressed on against 14. A tap and go, a roar from the crowd but no try and it went wide and more optimistic overtures as Ghumra dived for the corner. Back for another penalty and the Rugby Lane crowd were beseeching Sir to indicate a try but Hegarty was held up. Reeds relief and a drop out under the posts to restart play. The Black & Whites countered with zeal and finally opened their account. Perhaps Mr Richardson had a sense of occasion as the try-scorer was George London. The conversion was added but with another dramatic twist as Freddy Bunting was allowed a second bite at the cherry and the hosts led 7-0.

The opening score was not the sign of the floodgates opening but saw the visitors getting a foothold in the game. It was obvious that Reeds were looking to play at a high tempo and get the ball to their dangerous back division. Penalties were played quickly and the RW pack was gaining the ascendancy at the scrummage. On the half hour they were rewarded with an outstanding try. The combination of superb line of running by Pete Cole and a perfectly timed pass saw winger Matt Stevenson run in under the posts with four colleagues in congratulatory support. Fullback Pete Cole added the extras to level the scores at 7-7. Moments later it took two tremendous tackles within a minute by Josh Pulvirenti to snuff out a potential break from halfway. Despite the conditions it was Reeds who were finishing the first half the stronger with centre Josh Clark to the fore using intelligent chips and grubbers to keep Sutton on the back foot. The first period ended with no further addition to the scoreboard. Reeds Weybridge had achieved the notable success of being on level terms despite playing against a very strong wind.

The start of the second period was a mirror of the first which was hardly surprising as there was no easing up from the elements. The men from Whiteley Village dominated territory and possession but they discovered, as had their Sutton counterparts, that those final yards were the hardest. Marcus Clark on the wing came closest to breaking the deadlock but the S&E defensive line stood strong whether it was Kyren Ghumra on the wing or the tireless pack. Increasingly the flow of the game was disrupted by infringements on the deck that created a stalemate that prevented the Reeds backs demonstrating their quality and gave the Sutton & Epsom defence added confidence in what was a surprisingly uneventful third quarter.

The final twenty minutes signalled the start of increased excitement as Matt Stevenson’s quickly taken penalty appeared to have caught Sutton & Epsom napping. However, a fabulous cover tackle by Captain Bunting was a most timely intervention that was improved when S&E were awarded a relieving penalty. Soon it was advantage Sutton & Epsom with Freddie Bunting making a surging break to the 22 to link with centre partner Ellis Rudder that concluded with a Sutton penalty. The resulting 5-metre attacking lineout drifted on the wind with a not straight verdict giving the visitors an escape route. Perhaps it was frustration but the visitors ignored the helpful conditions to run the ball from their own line. The yards gained were immediately lost to a penalty and petulance that saw them marched back 10 metres. Ironically Reeds next opportunity came as Sutton lost the ball in the opposition 22 and it was fly-hacked clear. Suddenly the pitch opened up with RW players streaming ominously forward but Austin Bell did wonderfully to secure the loose ball to avert disaster on halfway.

With the game in the balance and in time added on Reeds were within touching distance of glory but had the consolation of a penalty. It was an easy decision for captain Herbie Finn to opt for the kick at goal as fullback Pete Cole effortlessly put the visitors 10-7 up. One could imagine Captain Finn imploring his team to secure the restart and send it deep into Sutton territory and on no account concede a penalty. With the billowing breeze making the restart more of a lottery than it might have been the Black & Whites were

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given the lifeline of a penalty. It was advanced to the corner and another penalty followed the lineout. Sutton went for route one as tempers boiled over before the final play of the season. The forwards provide a mass of steaming humanity on the try-line and Rob Hegarty squeezed over to win the game for Sutton & Epsom. It was left for George London to attempt the touchline conversion and despite a passable impression of All Black legend Don Clarke it fell short. The final whistle blew and Sutton & Epsom had snatched victory by 12-10. The supporters retired to the clubhouse and for those who live in a tinkerless world they ruminated on what might have been in 2023-4. The Sutton & Epsom victory was synonymous with the man of the hour, George London, it was full of determination, a never say die attitude and a will to win in adversity that saw Sutton over the line. Reeds had the edge in the scrummage and the more threatening back division. However, the powerful wind did not bring the anticipated cascade of points as both XVs demonstrated determined defence and it was the Black & Whites who gained the points by virtue of winning the try battle by 2-1 but only at the eleventh hour with Brunnhilde on her final chorus.

Sutton & Epsom
O'Brien, Findlay, Rudder, Bunting ©, Ghumra, Lennard, Munford, Boaden, Farrell, Gibson, Glanville, McTaggart, London, Pulvirenti & Hegarty.
Replacements: Al Khaldi, Jones & Bell.

Reeds Weybridge
Cole, Stevenson, J. Clark, Maddock, Brown, Jesty, Palmer, L. Day, R. Day, Ring, Finn ©, Wasko, G. Corner, Collyer, A. Corner.
Replacements: Rawding, Relfe & M. Clark.

Image courtesy Robin Kennedy

Sutton and Epsom leapfrog Old Colfeians in the end

9 April 2024

Old Colfeians 22 – Sutton and Epsom RFC 31. Saturday 23rd March.

In bygone years this was a regular league fixture and Saturday bore witness to the sixteenth such encounter between the clubs. Old Colfeians is a club to be mentioned in whispered tones whilst in the company of James Clark's title-winners of 2006-07. That Black and White celebrated side saw their perfect record spoiled on the club's last venture to Horn Park in January 2007. The 2023-24 vintage may not have won this league but they headed home with a 31-22 victory and replaced the hosts in eighth place in the league table.

The revolving door of selection meant that only Messrs Lennard and Bunting were in the same shirts in a reshuffled Sutton back division following the culling of Cobham. For the pack it was a minor disruption that saw Tom Boaden elevated from the bench in the absence of Alex Mount. Sutton played with the significant advantage of the elements in the first period as a strong wind tore down the pitch. Despite this handicap Colfeians started on the front foot. A sublime moment of legerdemain by Tom Chapman put Ollie Burkett into space and the full back was only denied by an eleventh hour cover tackle by Tom Lennard. The wind hampered the Sutton lineout and led to an OCs scrum. The set piece wheeled and the alert home Number 9 Jed Wylie wriggled free to score from 5 metres out. Chris Harris added the conversion for a most valuable 7-0 lead in less than advantageous conditions.

Sutton replied instantly as the Horn Park XV struggled to deal with the restart gifting the visitors with a prime attacking penalty position 5 metres from their line. The initial surge from the set play failed to secure the score but a couple of phases later Josh Pulvirenti forced his way over in the corner. The touchline conversion was blown wide and the Black and Whites trailed 5-7. Moments later a counter by Kyren Ghumra ended in an SandE penalty that was drilled into the corner by Freddy Bunting. From the 5-metre lineout the Sutton pack went through multiple phases inching not only closer to the try line but also the uprights. Robust Colfeians' defence was finally ended by Mr Tobias Whinney awarding Sutton another 5-metre penalty. Once more the attacking tapped option was taken rather than a kick at the posts.

Again the forwards took control and ushered hooker Chris Farrell over the line. Normal service resumed for the Bunting boot and the visitors led 12-7 after a dozen minutes.

From the restart Sutton's counter was penalised for crossing and it was Colfeians turn to put the ball in the corner and attack from a 5-metre lineout. The Black and White line held but infringed. Playing the advantage a Colfeians deft chip just sailed over the head of Chris Harris but the winger punished SandE by adding the three points when play was brought back for the penalty. OCs trailed 10-12 in a game of fluctuating fortunes in the first quarter.

Approaching the half hour Sutton secured their third try. With their best passage of play of the match so far the backs and forwards combined through several phases before Ellis Rudder was stopped deep in the 22 but the cover infringed on the deck. On this occasion it was Callum Gibson who was the beneficiary with a try from the forward effort from the tapped penalty. Freddy Bunting's touchline conversion was even more impressive as he made it at the third attempt having aborted his first two approaches as the wind blew the ball off the tee. Sutton had extended their advantage to lead 19-10.

The visitors were soon threatening another score. A wonderful break by Tom Lennard from his own half released fullback Ciaran Mohr who stepped inside the cover, took the last tackle before passing to Alfie Baker but the ball was not gathered and a wonderful score was denied. In addition Ciaran Mohr injured his ankle and was replaced by Austin Bell. A rampant Sutton did not dwell on this missed opportunity and shortly afterwards had their bonus point try. The impressive Josh Pulvirenti made a break and marauded into the 22 and passed to Angus Findlay who was rewarded for his excellent support play with the try. Bunting moved to the ball with his familiar constabulary stroll and converted with a laconic air for 26-10. Ten minutes later and SandE added a fifth try from a precise lineout routine that saw Rob Hegarty burst through a gap to score. Though the conversion failed Sutton had a healthy 31-10 lead.

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With the first half near completion SandE ran the ball from their 22 from the restart looking to maximise their advantage from the windy conditions. They were brought back for a forward pass and there began a lengthy final play. It was a rugby version of 'Groundhog Day'. The teams scrummaged, the hosts were awarded a penalty, the visitors prevented a score and the referee brought them back for the penalty and Colfeians chose to scrummage again. Finally, after 52 minutes in the first period, and a yellow card for Sutton's Dan Jones, winger Tom Chapman squeezed in at the corner. A very challenging conversion fell short and the first half ended with the Black and Whites 31-15 ahead.

The interval had comical overtones as Sutton stayed out on the pitch whilst their hosts enjoyed the warmth of their dressing room. With a sable sky, a hailstorm swept the pitch and Sutton players took shelter behind their bulkier colleagues. Perhaps it was the reward of the Gods for braving the weather as the game restarted in sunshine and becalmed as cruelly the Colfeians were to be denied the strong wind enjoyed by Sutton. The second half was a curious affair. With excellent tactical acumen and pragmatism the numerically inferior visitors spent their punishment time in the opposition 22. This benevolent occupation was then extended to practically the entire second half. Old Colfeians adopted the mantle of Horatio and Rorke's Drift in heroic defence whilst Sutton became a hybrid of Sisyphus and Tantalus.

With the game approaching full time Old Colfeians finally made it into the Sutton and Epsom half and won a penalty. The ball was drilled into the corner for a 5-metre lineout. The throw was secured and the mountainous figure of captain Andy O'Malley powered over to score. Chris Harris then reduced the arrears to 22-31 and the crowd awoke from their slumber at the prospect of a thrilling climax. After their prolonged territorial dominance Sutton's character was now put to the test as an element of doubt over the outcome entered into the equation. If the first period was inordinately lengthy the second period was unbelievably time consuming as it racked up 57 minutes. There were several stoppages with the physios in attendance but once again it was last play that endured. Sutton were again reduced to 14 when Rob Hegarty departed following a high tackle but Colfeians could not force another score to garner any points. The game ended with the hosts defending and frustrating SandE who failed to add to their score in the second period. The match finally concluded with the Black and Whites victorious by 31-22.

There may be aficionados who love nothing more than a reset scrum and a catalogue of infringements as frequent stoppages deny free-flowing rugby as with this second half. However, that seems as likely as someone preferring the brutalist architecture of a housing estate in Stalinist Russia to the Taj Mahal. It was a shame as a sizeable crowd had gathered for Past Players' Day adding greatly to the occasion and superlative bonhomie in the clubhouse after the game. Sutton were the deserved winners but Old Colfeians failed to exploit their superiority at the scrummage as discipline and errors undermined their performance. In the lineout and the loose the SandE pack played with great control.

Angus Findlay, starting for the first time in his preferred Number 9 shirt, gave an assured performance releasing the back division that showed moments of fluency and quality. The Black and Whites failure to convert pressure into points in the second half was more down to the courageous Colfeian defence than the inadequacies of the Sutton attack.

The Easter weekend offers a rest for the teams before the league season concludes on Saturday 6th April. Old Colfeians will be taking a trip to relegated Cobham and have the prospect of ending the campaign with a thumping victory. Meanwhile at Rugby Lane Sutton and Epsom will host Reeds Weybridge aiming to make amends for a 27-12 loss on the opening day of the season.

Sutton and Epsom
Mohr, Baker, Rudder, Bunting ©, Ghumra, Lennard, Findlay, Boaden, Farrell, Gibson, Glanville, McTaggart, Jones, Pulvirenti and Hegarty.
Replacements: Al Khaldi, Tame and Bell.

Old Colfeians:
Burkett, Harris, Hepden, Jones, Chapman, Smith, Wylie, Whichello, Newins, Rameaux, O'Malley ©, Cunningham, Walker, Carter and Smith.
Replacements: Orubo, Greatorex-Sanderson and Nagel.

Sutton and Epsom blow the Cobwebs away

9 April 2024

Sutton & Epsom RFC 49 Cobham 13. Saturday 16th March.

Having lost to the basement boys of London Cornish, the Exiles gaining their first win on the road for over a year, Sutton and Epsom supporters arrived at Rugby Lane with a sense of mild trepidation. Could the proverbial lightning revisit with the arrival of eleventh-placed Cobham who had lost their last eleven matches. For those fearing that the wheels had come off the Black & White charabanc it appears, on Saturday's evidence, to have passed its MOT and was in perfect working order as the team ran in a magnificent seven tries for an emphatic 49-13 triumph. The victory mathematically secured Sutton & Epsom's position in Level 6.

Freddy Bunting kicked off into the breeze and initiated a period of high tempo attacking rugby that saw his team living in the Cobham 22 for the majority of the opening 15 minutes. The visitors defended impressively none more so than when from a tapped 5-metre penalty Josh Glanville was held up over the line by a superb tackle. Having had all of the game Sutton & Epsom conceded the first points when, on their first sortie into the S&E half, Jonathan Holmes kicked a penalty for a 3-0 lead. A few minutes later and the Black & Whites received a second dose of unpalatable medicine as Holmes made it 6-0.

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It was at this stage the classic debate of whether to kick for points or seek greater rewards was raging amongst the crowd. The hosts approach was to turn down every kick at goal and seek the higher tariff score. In the course of the first period they were to reject many kicks with several in front of the uprights. Finally on the half hour their bravery was rewarded. The ball went wide and Lawrence Elliott, running a superb line, broke through and using all of his strength powered over. Freddy Bunting splendidly bisected the uprights for a 7-6 lead. Cobham's attempt to regain the lead with a third penalty failed as the first period neared its conclusion.

Approaching time added on Cobham were reduced to 14 when Mr Priddle issued a yellow card to blindside Max Hales who departed as a result of the cumulative effect of infringements in the 22. Sutton & Epsom went for the tap penalty and it was the redoubtable Alex Mount who stretched out to secure the try. Freddy Bunting added the simple conversion for a 14-6 lead. The restart is often the most dangerous moment and the Black & Whites conceded a penalty but the visitors attempts to secure a platform to attack the Sutton line faltered and the referee blew for half-time. S&E had a vital 14-6 lead with a man advantage to take into the second period with the wind behind them.

The Rugby Lane team pressed hard to extend their lead in the opening exchanges of the second half attempting to benefit from their numerical and meteorological advantages. The Bunting boot put his team in the 22. Cobham survived for ten minutes before hooker Chris Farrell collected his sixth try of the campaign. Captain Bunting made it three out of three as Sutton led 21-6. The visitors then showed the fighting spirit one would expect from a team teetering on the brink of relegation. Awarded a penalty in the 22 they tapped and went. Sutton & Epsom had failed to retreat and they repeated the option with captain and scrum-half Ryan Saunders scoring. Jonathan Holmes converted to put Cobham back in the hunt trailing 13-21.

Barely had the inspiring words of encouragement of a comeback drifted on the wind and Cobham were standing behind their posts awaiting another Sutton & Epsom conversion. From the restart Dan Jones gathered the ball from a ruck outside the visitors' 22 and exploited a gap to streak away for the try. With the extras S&E led 28-13 and had secured their try bonus point. That score thoroughly demoralised the men from the Memorial Ground as it inspired the Rugby Lane XV. The game entered the final quarter and the hosts provided their faithful fans with their most exhilarating rugby seen at home this season.

Sensible tactical kicking by half-backs Munford and Lennard kept the hosts on the attack. A wonderful break from Tom Lennard at 10 looked certain to lead to a try but he was felled by a tap tackle close to glory. The crowd did not have to wait long for try Number 5. The ball went to the opposite flank and a training ground routine was executed to perfection from a lineout. The ball was secured, the line-break made and the overlap exploited as Ciaran Mohr strolled in at the corner. Freddy Bunting made light of the testing conversion for 35-13.

Try number six again owed its success to repetition on cold winter nights. A 5-metre lineout was secured and the pack advanced forward to provide Rob Hegarty with his eighth try of the season. It was a fitting reward for the quality of the lineout from the triumvirate of McTaggart, Pulvirenti and Glanville who had given Sutton & Epsom an excellent platform all afternoon. With a degree of inevitably Freddy Bunting converted and it was 42-13. For the first time this season at Rugby Lane the home crowd could enjoy a relaxing conclusion to a match. Previous contests might have been thrilling for the neutral observer but had provided far too much anxiety. Cobham attempted to end on a high point and looked destined to secure an otiose try. However a wayward pass bounced into the grateful hands of Angus Findlay who sped away from his own 22 for his first 1 st XV league try. Freddy Bunting completed a perfect afternoon with the boot and the match concluded with Sutton & Epsom enjoying a resounding 49-13 win.

Apart from the security of success it was a red-letter day for two of the Sutton and Epsom side. Steve Munford in playing his 215th league match for the club surpassed Steve Warnham's total and lies second to the 251-game Sam Frost. Meanwhile, with his first successful kick of the afternoon, Freddy Bunting broke Sam Hurley's 2015-6 record of 208 points in a league season. It was a redemptive afternoon for the skipper after he had appeared to have supped at the river Lethe on his last outing. Sutton & Epsom may be breathing easier but carnivorous creatures circle the Cobham carrion as descent into the abyss of Level 7 seems probable after Gravesend's victory over Beckenham. With the 'Jersey Reprieve' there will be the incongruous site of Cobham supporters googling the results of Chosen Hill FP, Kirkby Lonsdale and Old Crossleyans in the weeks to come. Next Saturday S&E enjoy their last away day of the campaign with a first visit to Horn Park since January 2007 to take on Old Colfeians who they defeated 21-17 in December.

Sutton & Epsom
O'Brien, Huie, Elliott, Bunting ©, Findlay, Lennard, Munford, Mount, Farrell, Gibson, Glanville, McTaggart, Jones, Pulvirenti & Hegarty.
Replacements: Boaden, Tame & Mohr.

Cobham
Penfold, Springett, Boswell, Burnett, Yorke, Holmes, Saunders ©, Aujla, Muirhead, Bliss, Westgarth-Taylor, Farmer, Hales, Blackwood & Porter.
Replacements: Nunn, Keefe & O'Connor.

Image courtesy Robin Kennedy

Cornish Collect Crucial Win on Heartbreak Hill

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Sutton & Epsom 22 – London Cornish RFC 31 . Saturday 2nd March.

The fixture at the Richard Evans Memorial Playing Fields in November was notable for the debut of Willem Ratu who scored a hat trick that helped Sutton & Epsom to a healthy 53-24 triumph. In the absence of the injured Taranaki Terror all those in the Cornish camp were hoping that this would create a more level playing field as they continued their efforts to climb out of the relegation abyss and get some traction from their victory over fellow strugglers Cobham in the last round of fixtures. The Exiles made it two in a row as they gave their supporters another injection of belief with a priceless bonus point win by 31-22 over Sutton.

The downpours in the week and more torrential rain led to a change in location for this fixture. The teams relocated from the serene surroundings of Rugby Lane to the windswept wastelands of Priest Hill. The hosts kicked off the match playing against the gusting wind and the significant slope. At this stage of the campaign the coaches are unlikely to be paid the ultimate divine compliment of selecting their full complement but London Cornish were delighted to field their first choice back three who were to be significant contributors. At once the visitors had the chance to open the scoring with a penalty. Michael Edworthy's effort was blown off course and it remained 0-0. Their dismay was short-lived, from the 22 drop out they secured possession and spread it wide. Left wing Matt Hakes powerful touchline run was assisted by some weak tackling as his determination saw him touch down in the corner. The challenging conversion drifted wide as the Exiles led 5-0 within five minutes.

London Cornish sought to exploit the conditions with thoughtful kicking to keep Sutton & Epsom on the defensive and penned in their 22. In their efforts to escape the hosts conceded another penalty in front of the posts. The wind again came to Sutton's rescue as it was becoming increasingly evident that place-kicking was going to be an arduous task. On the quarter hour S&E made their first significant contribution to proceedings. Running the ball with a penalty advantage they knocked on with an overlap in the 22. They had a second chance as they kicked the penalty to the corner but the Cornish won the line out. They were gifted a third chance as the ball was touched down in goal for a Sutton scrum. It was third time extremely unlucky as they sauntered blind for a definite score only to be halted by the whistle as they had offended at the scrummage. The Sutton profligacy was instantly punished. The ball was chipped over the Black & White defence in their 22. Covering fullback Tom Lennard lost his footing and was enveloped by the Cornish who drove him over the line. From the 5-metre scrum the visitors shunted the Sutton pack into reverse and Number 8 Conor Pearce applied the finishing touch and 10-0 to the Exiles. Five minutes later there was a repeat performance. The kick into space saw the retreating Kyren Ghumra struggling to gather the ball and it was only a last gasp dive that prevented a try. Another 5-metre scrum to the visitors but this time near the posts and the Sutton pack held the drive. Variety is the spice of life and Ciaran Johnston released his backs and centre Peter Brogden waltz in untouched. Simon Edworthy, grateful for a simpler conversion, added the extras for 17-0 after thirty minutes.

A possible lifeline dangled tantalisingly before Sutton eyes as Mr Simon Matthews was left prostrate on the pitch. After treatment from the physios the referee gingerly returned to the vertical and was able to continue with the game. As much as the visitors were intelligently exploiting the elements the hosts were being naïve as they kicked poorly to the back three and attempted long passes on the wind. With the interval approaching London Cornish secured a bonus point with their fourth try of the afternoon. Fly-half Michael Edworthy drifted across creating space for inside centre Peter Brogden who presented his centre partner, captain George Kimmins, with an easy run in under the posts. The conversion made it 24-0 to the visitors.

In the dying moments of the first half London Cornish had a wonderful opportunity to add a fifth try but scrambling defence denied them as they dropped the ball with the line at their mercy. The referee ended the half with the Exiles 24-0 up. All concerned were wondering just how many points the slope and wind were worth. Would the missed kicks prove to be costly and could Sutton & Epsom transform a lamentable first period performance into a rousing comeback? Conditions temporarily deteriorated at the start of the second half as teeming rain was added to the difficulties to be endured by the players. It was essential for the Black & Whites to score early. Within five minutes Matt Whitaker was driving his way over the line. Mr Matthews ruled that he had been held up over the line. The S&E disappointment was helped by the fact that London Cornish were reduced to 14 as Number 8 Conor Pearce was carded for a high tackle. The hosts took advantage of their numerical superiority and drove the Cornish pack off their own ball and Matt Whitaker scored. Freddy Bunting added an impressive conversion from the flank and S&E were up and running at 7-24. Mercifully the rain abated and moments later ceased. Sutton had now emptied their bench with Messrs Mount, Pulvirenti and Rudder being replaced by the triumvirate of Boaden, Jones and Elliott as they looked to reinvigorate their efforts.

At the end of the third quarter Sutton were in prime position to reduce the deficit but an errant throw to the 5-metre lineout gifted Cornish a relieving scrum. It was the visitors' turn to have their clearance returned with meaning. Tom Lennard countered and combined with Ghumra and Elliott to get to the corner. Sterling cover by Robert Mackay denied the score but the home team pressed on. White line fever descended on the Black & White ranks and they were grateful to be awarded a penalty. Finally, the pack forced its way over and Callum Gibson emerged as the scorer. It was a fine reward for the prop on an afternoon when he had carried tirelessly and with great effect. The kick from the extremities missed as Sutton trailed 12-24.

With the match entering the final 10 minutes the crucial moment came. London Cornish had made a rare visit to the Sutton 22. The hosts looked to counter and exploit a generous blindside. Cornish winger Matt Hakes gambled and won the lottery as he intercepted and strolled in for the fifth try. Simon Edworthy bisected the uprights and suddenly the gap that had so recently appeared bridgeable now seemed to be a gaping chasm as London Cornish led 31-12. Though visibly deflated by the score it was not long before the Rugby Lane men roused themselves for a grandstand finish. Firstly, Kyren Ghumra scored in the corner and anxious visitors asked Sir how long remained. 31-17 with two minutes of regulation time to play. The drama intensified as Rob Hegarty scored Sutton's fourth try in time added on. Perhaps it was the lack of a

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scoreboard at Priest Hill but the hosts' arithmetic let them down. With the score 22-31 and a conversion under the posts to come a successful kick would have secured a second bonus point. However, a rapidly taken drop kick missed. But the Gods seemed to be favouring Sutton as they were awarded a penalty on the final play of the game. Captain Bunting lined up his kick but it drifted agonisingly wide.

The 31-22 win provided London Cornish with a significant boost in their bid for survival. They will be hoping that Sutton can do them a favour by beating relegation rivals Cobham on 16 th March when the campaign resumes. The Exiles deservedly won the match, they exploited the first half advantage superbly and despite some anxious moments at the death it would have been harsh if they had been denied a vital victory. For Sutton & Epsom there were far too many errors that undermined their performance and it was only in the late rally that they demonstrated their true worth. With three matches left for the Black & Whites they still have work to do to retain their status in Level 6 and they will be hoping that the extremes of the weather will not see them
relocated to Priest Hill in their two remaining home matches.

Sutton & Epsom
Lennard, Findlay, Rudder, Bunting ©, Ghumra, Bennion, Munford, Mount, Farrell, Gibson, Glanville, McTaggart, Pulvirenti, Hegarty & Whitaker.
Replacements: Boaden, Jones & Elliott.

London Cornish
Mackay, Hakes, Kimmins ©, Brogden, Bromage, Edworthy, Johnston, Pellow, Cruz, Theobald, Carr, McEwen, Fink, Webb, & Pearce.
Replacements: New, Sorgo-Mirosevic & Phoenix.

Photo credit: Robin Kennedy

Outwitted by Sidcup's set pieces

9 April 2024

Sidcup 45 Sutton & Epsom RFC 22. Saturday 17th February.

Sutton & Epsom RFC first played at Crescent Farm in February 1898 and it is a delight to record that modern times have not hindered this historic rivalry as the clubs met for the 21st time in the league era on Saturday afternoon. Earlier in the campaign the teams met at Rugby Lane with both clubs apologetically at the bottom of the table with a solitary success each. Sutton & Epsom came from behind to take the honours on that day. Since that November day the season has improved considerably for both clubs with the hosts arriving on the back of five straight wins. Sidcup's successful streak continued as they comprehensively and deservedly defeated S&E 45-22.

Sutton & Epsom were forced into four changes from the side that beat Gravesend with the back division incurring most of the disruption with three absentees but with the advantage of hindsight the loss of the Black & Whites' hooker probably had greater significance on the events that were to unfold. Captain Bunting started proceedings as the sides sparred in search of any early defensive frailties. The teams recycled the ball quickly, defences closed rapidly and kickers looked for open spaces and the status quo was maintained. A looping run from Sutton 10 Tom Lennard initiated the first genuine chance in the 22 but solid defensive tackling saw the ball go forward a few phases later. In contrast from a scrum on halfway Sidcup scored from their first sortie. The ball went wide and an overlap was created on the flank and Louis Keeley finished with aplomb despite a valiant effort from the diving Matt Symonds. The conversion fell short but the hosts led 5-0.

Sutton & Epsom's next chance to score was manufactured by a magnificent touchline clearance from Gareth O'Brien, being a yard or two from touch he magically threaded the ball 50 metres down the line. Though denied a stunning 50/22 the slavering chasers forced a penalty and Freddy Bunting happily accepted the points on offer for S&E to trail 3-5. As ever restarts are crucial and scrappy play saw the Black & Whites suddenly 5 metres from their own line with a scrum. Matt Whitaker carried well from a retreating pack giving Tom Lennard time to clear. Relief was temporary and punishment severe. Moments later Louis Keeley was collecting his and Sidcup's second try. On this occasion the winger left a less challenging conversion that was gratefully accepted by Tom Shea. The Crescent Farm fans warmly applauded the 12-3 lead with the first quarter nearly complete. It had become apparent that the excellent Sidcup pack had the upper hand in the set scrum. In addition Sutton were struggling with their lineout ball. Additionally and unexpectedly Freddy Bunting missed a chance to narrow the deficit as he slipped slightly on the muddy surface attempting another penalty. Then the visitors were further hampered as fullback Gareth O'Brien departed with an injured knee to be replaced by Ciaran Mohr. Once more it was a marvellous kick, this time a 50/22 by Tom Lennard that put the visitors in the opposition 22. S&E pressed for a score and were brought back for a penalty. Declining the easy three points they took the tap and Matt Whitaker celebrated his birthday with a try on the ground where he had previously recorded his 100th league try. Freddy Bunting added the extras and Sutton trailed 10-12 on the half hour.

Sutton & Epsom won a penalty at the restart as optimism rose amongst the ranks of the travelling support. Seconds later they were relieved that play was brought back for a knock on as Sidcup had intercepted and a certain try from 70 metres was denied. With half-time approaching Alex Mount received a yellow card. Not only was the Sutton scrum under pressure their front row had incurred the wrath of the referee over the technical issue of the scrums engaging. The result was a ten-minute breather for Mount for the accumulated offences. Reduced to 14 Sidcup had a wonderful opportunity to make the scoreboard reflect their pack's dominance. The 14 men from Rugby Lane appeared to have navigated the choppy seas to the safe waters of half-time harbour but the Kent men scored with the final play of the half. Taking the ball blind from deep the ball-carrier stepped out of a low tackle and an overlap opportunity developed from halfway. With clinical efficiency fullback Dan Masters strode home and Tom Shea's conversion was met by the whistle that

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concluded the first period. The 19-10 interval lead was a fair reflection of superiority that Sidcup enjoyed in the key areas of the lineout and scrum that had provided the vital possession.

The second half began with the Black & Whites still numerically hampered and before anyone could debate if they could survive without further addition to the scoreboard Sidcup had their third try. Outside centre George Bird breezing through the defence to notch up their bonus point try which was effortlessly converted by Tom Shea for 26-10. Sutton showed their defiance a minute later. From a ruck on the 22 Matt Whitaker opted for the most direct route and found clear water before he evaded the last couple of defenders to score his second try. Freddy Bunting added the conversion and with that kick recorded his 200th point of the league campaign. Sutton & Epsom trailed 17-26 and hope lingered on.

It was Sidcup's turn to pin Sutton & Epsom back with a 50/22. Though S&E were now back to their full compliment the hosts immediately created a chance and how on earth they did not score will remain a mystery to all who were present. The Black & Whites cleared their lines from a 5-metre scrum but it was a temporary stay of execution. In contrast to the recently butchered offering Connor McDonald excelled with a wonderful solo effort weaving his way to the line. Though the conversion faltered with the score at 31-17 it was threatening to become a long afternoon for the visitors. That threat became a reality five minutes later. Forced back into their 22 the visitors conceded a penalty. The hosts opted for a scrum then ran wide and Connor McDonald had the ball again, with the defence desperately trying to cover men outside, he ghosted in for his second score. Tom Shea added to his account and Sidcup extended their lead to 38-17.

With 15 minutes remaining Sutton needed to carry the game to Sidcup and attempt to get something from the fixture. A fine kick return by Angus Findlay ably supported by replacements Callum Gibson and Dan Jones got S&E into the 22. There followed a Sutton try that owed more to Heath Robinson than Christopher Wren. From a central position Tom Lennard chipped ahead and the ball was not secured by the defence in the ensuing chaos the ball ended up in the right hand corner where Freddy Bunting was on hand for his first try of the season. Sutton & Epsom now had a very attainable target, the fourth try and a valuable bonus point, despite trailing 22-38.

Sutton suffered the immediate handicap of Callum Gibson becoming the second member of the front row union to get a yellow card through accumulated indiscretions. Sidcup went for the jugular only to be denied by Alex Mount's tackle under the posts forcing a spillage. The award of a 5-metre scrummage under their own posts was a mixed blessing for the Surrey men. The pack was shunted back, the posts were waving dramatically and Number 8 Nick Jansen touched down for a magnificent seventh Sidcup try. Tom Shea added the easiest of conversions for his tenth point of the afternoon as his side led 45-22.

The contest was over but there began the game within the game as Sutton went in search of their bonus point. First of all Matt Whitaker stormed to the halfway but to no avail. Then a wonderful run down the wing by Angus Findlay ended as he failed to get his pass to Ellis Rudder who was in support. The veteran Whitaker again went on the rampage and threw in a kick ahead for good measure. A penalty was kicked into the corner and the 5-metre lineout was lost. Then on the final play of the game Ellis Rudder broke clear in the 22 and passed to Matt Symonds. The rapturous cheers of the Sutton supporters turned to groans as the referee whistled for a forward pass. The game ended with Sidcup the clear winner by 45-22.

If there was a Man of the Match Award it should have gone to the Sidcup pack as they were magnificent to a man. The domination of the scrum, lineout and giving their backs front-foot ball was the telling factor in this game. Sutton & Epsom will regroup with a weekend off from the cut and thrust of league action before the visit of London Cornish on 2 nd March to Rugby Lane. For those wishing to attend please note that it will be a 3pm kick off.

Sutton & Epsom: Gareth O'Brien, Angus Findlay, Ellis Rudder, Freddy Bunting ©, Matt Symonds, Tom Lennard, Joe Lovatt, Tariq Al Khaldi, Alex Mount, Tom Boaden, Josh Glanville, Ewan McTaggart, George London, Rob Hegarty & Matt Whitaker.
Replacements: Callum Gibson, Dan Jones & Ciaran Mohr.

Sidcup: Dan Masters; Connor McDonald, George Bird, Sam Leek, Louis Keeley, Tom Shea, Simon Vincent, Teddy Gibbons, Jonathan Fordham, Sam Carmen, Ben Stock, Steven Evans, Fred Ruff, Billy Williams & Nicholas Jansen.
Replacements: Harry Large, Tom Epps & Alex Ure.

Epsom dig deep to beat Gravesend

9 April 2024

Sutton & Epsom RFC 21 Gravesend 19. Saturday 3rd February.

It has reached the business end of the campaign and for all clubs a studious look at the table and the remaining fixtures will determine their aspirations. For Sutton & Epsom and Gravesend it was a fixture that would relieve relegation fears for the victor but increase anxiety for the defeated. When the clubs met earlier this season on the Rectory Field it was a match rather ruined by the referee's penchant for puritanical pedantry as the crowd endured an endless stream of penalties. Gravesend triumphed 36-29 with their clinical lineout securing multiple tries. On Saturday, with great credit to referee Kasey Allen, those present enjoyed a rousing contest unimpeded by the whistle as the Black & Whites secured their first win after a quartet of losses.

On a cloudy but mild afternoon on an excellent surface Gravesend kicked off playing towards the clubhouse. The temptation to watch England play Italy was too great for many and a rather Spartan gathering assembled. As England's plight increased so did the crowd watching the local contest. The opening five minutes of high tempo rugby with both sides attacking with gusto set

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the tone before the first scrummage interrupted the entertainment. The backs probed, the defences demonstrated thunderous tackling and the kickers sparred for territorial advantage. If Sutton were not wary of the Gravesend pack before the start they had an unpleasant reminder on the quarter hour mark. A penalty was conceded and the ball kicked into the corner. The lineout ball was taken cleaning. The initial surge was halted but slickly the ball was spun to the blindside where Brendan Kelly was in splendid isolation and had the easiest task to score in the corner. Fortune favoured S&E as Josh Smith's finely struck conversion came back off the upright. Gravesend led 5-0 with Sutton left to ponder discipline and penalty counts.

Any anxiety in the ranks of the Sutton supporters was instantly assuaged. The visitors cleared the restart but Gareth O'Brien and Ellis Rudder combined to run it back into the Gravesend 22 to win a penalty. It was the hosts' turn to kick into the corner for the attacking lineout. The first assault saw Freddie Bunting close to glory but an earlier infringement meant the home team had a second chance. As it has been for over a decade the go-to man was Matt Whitaker and he delivered. Perhaps conscious of his veteran status he arrived clean-shaven this week, though it only took days off his appearance it had not diminished his strength and footwork near the line as he powered over. Freddy Bunting's conversion put Sutton & Epsom ahead 7-5.

It was now that Gravesend winger Andrew Cooke entered the fray. His first run was rather lateral but evaded too many defenders before the ball was marshalled into touch. That was merely an appetiser to his next contribution. He gathered a clearance in his 22 in the middle of the pitch and ran the ball straight back into the Sutton 22 before being denied a sensational try. Perhaps it needed that fright to ignite the hosts. S&E now put together their best phases of the match as forwards and backs in unison swept down the pitch recycling the ball at pace. The attack ended with a penalty for a high tackle. Yet again the crowd waited to see if a 5-metre lineout would be converted into points. Once more with clinical efficiency the forwards controlled the ball and advanced to the line for lock Josh Glanville to score. Captain Bunting bisected the uprights to extend Sutton's advantage to 14-5.

The remainder of the first period was played out without further addition to the scoreboard. The indication of the first half was that this match was evenly poised with Gravesend not only dangerous through their powerful pack but carrying significantly more attacking threat in their back division than was seen in the October meeting. For S&E the lineout was functioning superbly, the set scrum had manfully met the challenge and they were playing with pace and precision. The sides turned around with all to play for with Sutton holding the upper hand 14-5.

The Rugby Lane crowd nearly had the perfect start to the second half. Centre Lawrence Elliott went from the sublime to the ridiculous. He picked the perfect angle to break the line and strode purposefully into the Gravesend 22 with a try looking probable he then threw out a pass that could generously be described as unforgiving as the bemused winger, Ellis Rudder, watched the ball
speed towards the advertising hoardings. Though Sutton stole the lineout ball they could not manufacture another opening. Soon the Rugby Lane XV was to be on the defensive. A penalty in the Black & White 22 saw the visitors opt for a scrummage and as they went wide a kick through rolled against the corner flag as Sutton scrambled in defence. This started a period of relentless pressure. The hosts did not aid their cause by failing to find touch with a clearance. The Kent men were now playing their best rugby and it seemed to be a question of when rather than if they would score.

However, it was now that possibly the key factor of the fixture was becoming evident. The Sutton defence was obdurate in the extreme, to a man they tackled tenaciously and got on their feet eager to put in another hit. Almost miraculously the line held as Gravesend were frustrated time and again as they were held up over the line. Eventually the visitors scored and it took exceptional work from winger Matthew Brady twisting and turning to score in the corner with multiple tacklers in attendance. Josh Smith converted exquisitely from the touchline as they made it a two-point deficit, 12-14. Significantly it had taken ten minutes of siege warfare for the try which must have emboldened the resolve of the hosts whilst equally left the visitors asking what do we need to do to score. From the restart Gravesend were hampered by a yellow card as an instinctive outstretched arm, with no malice intended, caught Kyren Ghumra's head. The winger had to be replaced by Matt Symonds but Sutton had ten minutes to play against 14 men.

Reacting to the numerical superiority with great urgency the home team went in search of points to extend their lead beyond a solitary score. Soon they were given an opportunity. Despite being awarded a penalty very much within the capabilities of the prolific Bunting boot the captain chose to go for the corner. His bravery was rewarded as the lineout was secured and the pack advanced to the line for Chris Farrell to score. The vital conversion was added by Freddy Bunting and the 21-12 lead meant that Gravesend would have to score twice in the final quarter of an hour.

If Sutton had been under siege before their third try they now endured an all out assault from Gravesend. It was the type of rugby that has every spectator on the edge of their seat living every carry and every tackle. The previous fortitude had transformed to cussed resilience and was on the way to heroic defence. Gravesend opted for scrums but the Sutton pack refused to yield. When the ball went wide the visiting backs opted for solo glory rather than swift passing and were met by scything tackles. The longer the line held the more desperate were the attacks. If the Kent men picked the wrong options to their great credit they did not offer up the knock-ons or penalties to assist the Sutton cause. Eventually centre Chris Brady crossed the whitewash and Josh Smith made it a two-point game once more as Sutton led 21-19. Crucially Sutton had eaten away significantly at the clock and only a couple of minutes were left.

It was now a test of game management and S&E controlled possession with admirable skill advance to the 22. On the attack they put through a speculative kick to the try line. Though it did not result in a score and gave Gravesend the ball it left the visitors with the Herculean labour of scoring from the length of the pitch. Moments later the final whistle blew and Sutton had won a victory of great significance. The manner of the success built on passion, team spirit and determination should hold them in great stead for the remainder of the campaign. For Gravesend they earned a bonus point but they put in a performance vastly superior to the earlier encounter and they certainly have all the assets required to navigate their way to safety.

There is no game next Saturday but the league continues on 17 th February with a trip to Crescent Farm to play the improving Sidcup who like S&E are on 38 points in the league but a place higher on points' difference.

Sutton & Epsom: Gareth O'Brien, Kyren Ghumra, Lawrence Elliott, Freddy Bunting ©, Ellis Rudder, Tom Lennard, Steve Munford, Alex Mount, Chris Farrell, Callum Gibson, Josh Glanville, Ewan McTaggart, George London, Rob Hegarty & Matt Whitaker.
Replacements: Tom Boaden, Tariq Al Khaldi & Matt Symonds.

Gravesend: Jamie Fautley, Andrew Cooke, Chris Brady, Josh Smith, Matt Brady, George Bruce, Ben Kite, Brendan Kelly, Terry Papworth, Jamie Forsythe, Tom Bird, Harry Brooker, Matt Hewitt, Samraj Chahal & Connor Murphy.
Replacements: Stan Dadson, Ben Reeve & Harvey Dean

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Current Front Page

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Image – Robin Kennedy

The Battle of Medway lost

9 April 2024

Medway 37 Sutton & Epsom RFC 26. Saturday 27th January. Sutton & Epsom returned to a most happy hunting ground on Saturday as their only previous trip to Priestfields saw them gain promotion in 2016 with an Andy Matthews hat trick. There were two survivors from that famous afternoon being back row brothers George London and Matt Whitaker. If nostalgia filled the air it was also because it was a red-letter day for Medway stalwart Tom Beaumont who was making his 200th league appearance. For the veteran flanker the hosts obliged with a 37-26 win in a hard fought and entertaining encounter.

Sutton saw a welcome return to Ellis Rudder, last seen four years ago at Westcliff in National 2, and Lawrence Eliott after injury breaks of vastly contrasting lengths of time. The Priestfield playing surface was in excellent condition considering the recent vagaries of the weather as Freddy Bunting kicked off on a dry but chill winter afternoon. S&E were on the attack immediately with a surging break to the opposition 22 from the prolific Matt Whitaker after the initial line break from Gareth O'Brien. An early riposte from the hosts gather the ball on the blindside on halfway with great prospects the ball inexplicably fell to earth. After this entertaining start the opening score was rather more mundane. The visitors conceded a penalty and were penalised for not retreating> The second infringement lead to a lineout in the corner. It was third time unlucky as the referee gave Owen Church-Mills the opportunity to open Medway's account. The Number 10 assuredly bisected the uprights to put Medway 3-0 up after five minutes.

Sutton & Epsom only took five minutes to not only open their account but claim the lead. Another Whitaker carry and support by the forwards led to a penalty. It was the hosts' turn to defend a lineout near their line. The men from Surrey secured the ball and Alex Mount was the beneficiary of their control as he forced his way over for a try. Freddy Bunting added the extras for a 7-3 advantage. Five minutes later the Black & Whites were celebrating a second try. Advancing into the 22 Freddy Bunting's probing kick behind the defence was gathered by winger Kyren Ghumra who finished with panache. Captain Bunting made it 14-3 with a relatively simple conversion. At the end of the first quarter the productive opening by the Rugby Lane XV was undone by a fatal self-inflicted wound as a woeful clearance in their 22 was predictably charged down. Medway took advantage of the retreating defence as Captain Antony Clement's perfectly timed pass gifted his centre partner, Sean Marriott, a try. Owen Church-Mills conversion made it 10-14.

The Black & Whites had a chance to reprise their opening score but Freddy Bunting overcooked the penalty and instead of a 5-metre lineout his team set up to receive a drop out. As the half continued to ebb and flow Medway were playing with great continuity and Sutton were indebted to a splendid tackle from Kyren Ghumra and an over-eager forward going off his feet at the ruck.

Medway made their first change as Deji Oyesola replaced Ryan Eastley in the front row. S&E were hampered by poor kicking from hand as two kicks in as many minutes found opponents with perfect precision who gratefully called 'mark'. As the errors mounted it was a great relief for the travelling supporters when fluency returned from the familiar source of Matt Whitaker. Gareth O'Brien and Tom Boaden continued the move that was only halted by foul play. The result was a yellow card, Medway reduced to 14 and Sutton with the penalty. The forwards took control and Chris Farrell burrowed his way over for his sides third try. Freddy Bunting's precise kick left the scoreboard reading Medway 10 Sutton & Epsom 21.

In time added on a long clearance kick unfortunately rolled through the dead ball area to the advantage of the home team. Whether you view that as careless or unlucky is up to the generosity of your spirit. However, this territorial penalty was compounded by then conceding a penalty. Owen Church-Mills stepped up to conclude the first period with his second penalty of the afternoon which took some of the gloss off the visitors first half performance but Sutton still led by 21-13 as the teams turned around.

Medway seized the initiative early in the second period. They camped in the Sutton 22 and carried relentlessly with powerful runs ably supported. However, defiant defence by Sutton averted the try that seemed imminent as a frustrated home team decided to opt for the three points at the third time of asking. Owen Church-Mills made it three out of three for penalties and his team were within a score at 16-21. It was becoming one-way traffic in the third quarter with Captain Clement at his influential best orchestrating the backs. But the stoic Sutton defence were a match for each and every carry and it was a mark of their defence that again the hosts opted for a kick at goal. It was rather a surprise when the latest strike slid wide. The despair of the home crowd was immediately replaced by a joyous cheer. The drop kick was taken by Number 8 Todd Johnson and the previously adamantine defence dissolved as he broke through a couple of tackles on his way to the 22. Then Deji Oyesola exploded through the ruck to run in untouched under the posts. The easiest of conversions was added and Medway had taken the lead 23-21.

This setback inspired Sutton who finally got some attacking ball having won a penalty at a scrum they kicked to the corner. It was the turn of the Medway defence to face the music. Willem Ratu, Freddy Bunting and the pack advanced to the line. One, two and three penalties were awarded. From the third the irrepressible Matt Whitaker added another try to his record-breaking career tally. The blustering breeze carried the conversion narrowly wide but a resurgent Sutton held a slender advantage at 26-23. Suddenly it appeared to be anyone's game with ten minutes left on the clock.

After what had gone before the denouement of the match was most disappointing for the visitors. Great credit must go to Medway who raised their game to play with urgency, accuracy and potency. They declined a kickable penalty for the lineout in the corner. This time the sustained pressure resulted in a try for lock Dan Jackson. Owen Church-Mills increased the gap to 30-26 with the game still in the balance. But the hosts were in no mood to sit back on so precarious a lead. At once they went in search of the bonus point and another try to secure the win. Ewan McTaggart appeared to have won an important lineout steal but the he tapped back bounced cruelly away from the visitors and was gathered by the alert Kent pack. Once more the hosts burst through a ruck but this time it was an assist to Deji Oyesola who was perfectly placed to trot in under the

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posts for his second try of the afternoon and an impregnable 37-26 lead as Owen Church Mills made his personal tally 16 points. The hosts had no problem running down the clock to secure the 37-26 bonus point win.

It was the third game in a row that Sutton & Epsom had led in the second half but failed to hold onto their advantage. For long periods their defence was of the highest quality but unfortunately errors were punished. Medway, as they had at Rugby Lane, carried aggressively with great continuity created by timely offloads to excellent support players. Antony Clement was at his influential best whilst Todd Johnson and Deji Oyesola impressed in the pack. For S&E there was a great sense of frustration despite a try-scoring bonus point they had the chance for more. For long spells the defence was first rate but there was a sense that more than one of the scores could have been avoided. In attack the Black & Whites conversion rate in the 22 was high and four tries on the road should be the foundation for a victory. There is an urgent need to find a way of seeing out these close finishes to win matches that are in the balance.

Next Saturday Sutton and Epsom entertain Gravesend, at Rugby Lane at 2:30pm, who like the hosts and Sidcup have a 10-6 loss record in the rather congested nether regions of the league.

Sutton & Epsom:
Gareth O'Brien, Kyren Ghumra, Lawrence Elliott, Freddy Bunting ©, Ellis Rudder, Tom Lennard, Steve Munford, Alex Mount, Chris Farrell, Tom Boaden, Josh Glanville, Ewan McTaggart, George London, Rob Hegarty & Matt Whitaker.
Replacements: Callum Gibson, Ben Green & Willem Ratu.

Medway:
Perry Macauley, John Sipawa, Sean Marriott, Antony Clement, Conor Chalmers, Owen Church-Mills, Ben Dance, Ryan Eastley, Josh Knight, Jack Nickalls, Dan Jackson, Jordan Stubbington, Harry Gibbons, Tom Beaumont & Todd Johnson.
Replacements: Deji Oyesola, Joseph Byrne & Robert O'Brien.

Local rugby team not blinded by Old Alley

9 April 2024

Sutton & Epsom RFC 15 – Old Alleynians 19. Saturday 13th January.

On Dulwich Common at the start of the league campaign the Old Alleynians won an exhilarating encounter 29-25 with a Will Malins hat trick grabbing the headlines. Both sides were much changed for the return fixture at Rugby Lane. After the Battersea Ironsides defeat Sutton and Epsom had mixed blessings from the physio hut as Tom Lennard had recovered from his back injury to make his first start at 10 but Willem Ratu's knee failed the fitness test. History repeated itself at Rugby Lane as the OAs again triumphed by four points but this time they had to come from behind to win 19-15.

On a cold but thankfully wind free afternoon Freddy Bunting initiated proceedings. Alleynians put themselves under pressure from the kick off as a forward met the kick with a technique better served for volleyball than rugby union. The unforgiving ball was spiked backwards and snatched by the Black & White pack from the retreating visitors. Encouraged by this immediate success Sutton stormed into the opposition 22 in search of the opening score. Excellent work by the forwards saw Tom Boaden carry to within a couple of strides before the ball was knocked on a couple of phases later. However, the backpedalling defence of the visitors had incurred the wrath of the referee and Sutton had the bonus of a five-metre penalty. The simple kick at goal was declined and the attacking option was chosen. Matt Whitaker rewarded the faith of his captain with a vintage score as he stepped past the first defenders before his telescopic reach stretched for the line. Freddy Bunting's conversion drifted wide but Sutton led 5-0.

Alleynians went in search of an immediate reply and imitated the hosts by regaining the restart. The men from Dulwich eagerly went through their phases and quickly entered the 22 and looked likely to make amends for their early reverse. The determined defence of S&E managed to prevent an equalising score as the visitors spilled the ball in contact with the line at their mercy. Sutton failed to adequately clear their lines and moments later the OAs were attacking once more. Again the referee awarded a penalty to the attacking side but on this occasion the kick at goal was the more obvious option being some distance from the try-line. The attempt fell short and the Black & Whites were able to clear their lines.

Buoyed by their early success Sutton were playing with confidence and a high tempo with the halfback combination of Munford and Lennard orchestrating the attacks. The hosts were faster in thought and deed than the visitors who were struggling to find their familiar rhythm. S&E on the front foot were impressive as forwards and backs combined and they took advantage of a penalty awarded at a scrum to kick to the corner. The hosts failed to capitalise dropping the ball but a poor clearance from the subsequent scrum led to another S&E lineout on the 22. Excellent continuity was matched by robust defence lthat ed to Tom Lennard floating a kick to the corner where Ciaran Mohr under scrutiny just failed to catch the ball a metre from the line. Fortune favoured Sutton as they were awarded a free kick for foot up in the scrum. Matt Whitaker carried the ball to the line and Tom Boaden was rewarded for his support play to receive the ball and score. Freddy Bunting converted for a 121-0 lead at the end of the first quarter.

A vocal Old Alleynians XV huddled behind the posts and called upon a greater collective effort after the second try and urged the team to match the S&E team's pace at the breakdown. From the restart Number 8 Gillam Crouch caught the ball and advanced at pace into the Sutton half. From the next scrum they drove the Black & White pack off their ball. The OAs looked favourites to score but tremendous tackling not only denied them but won Sutton & Epsom a relieving penalty. The match ebbed and flowed as the clock entered time added on in the first

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period. OAs continued to press for a vital score and belatedly got on the scorebioard. They kicked a penalty to the corner and secured the ball at the lineout. Though the forwards were denied the ball went wide and Robert Outram chose the perfect line to carve through the defence to score. Josh Winduss added the extras as Alleynians trailed 7-14. All their good work was nearly undone as they failed to kick the ball to touch on the final play of the half and conceded a penalty for an accidental offside. Freddy Bunting failed to compound their misery as his penalty attempt went narrowly wide and Mr Richardson blew for half-time with Sutton leading 12-7.

Sutton & Epsom were the first to score in the second period. Ten minutes into the half they were awarded a penalty as the men from Dulwich strayed offside. Captain Bunting stepped up and bisected the uprights to extend Sutton's advantage to 15-7. Both sides looked threatening in attack but equally the well organised defences neutered the offensive play. As the match progressed it was Old Alleynians who began to have the majority of the possession and territory. As the match entered the final quarter S&E were indebted to Gareth O'Brien who made a superb mark in the corner that not only prevented a possible try but allowed the hosts to relieve the siege. Stubborn Sutton defence was frustrating the visitors who conceded a penalty in the hosts'

However, it was becoming one-way traffic and only a cover tackle from Ross Parsons averted a score. But the Black & Whites just could not find the comfort of the opposition half.

With ten minutes remaining after a rather scrappy sequence of rucks with each side turning over the ball Old Alleynians were awarded a scrum lees than 10 metres from the Sutton posts in a central position. From the perfect platform winger Rory Holford touched down and replacement Ollie Hobman added the conversion. S&E's lead was now by the narrowest of margins at 15-14. The visitors were in the ascendancy and pressed ahead in search of the victory. Under pressure the Rugby Lane men responded in style as they advanced to the opposition 22 with their best sequence of the half. Sadly for the home supporters, unlike the first period, they did not come away with points after their foray in the opposition 22. As the match entered time added on the Sutton defences were breached near halfway. The visitors swarmed through and Ollie Hobman scored the crucial try. Though the conversion never threatened the posts Old Alleynians had the lead for the first time in the match, 19-15, with precious few minutes remaining.

The Black & Whites played with desperation trying to attack from deep in their half and Ben Osuntokun charged down a clearance and was only thwarted by the depth of the in-goal area from adding a fourth try. If that had been the case not only would Alleynians have secured a bonus point it would have given them an opportunity to deny Sutton a losing bonus point. In so evenly contested a match it would have been unduly harsh if the hosts had been denied the solitary point for their endeavours. Moments later the referee blew the final whistle. A keenly contested match concluded with Old Alleynians victorious 19-15 in a fixture that could have gone either way.

If the first encounter in September was entertaining fare enlivened by an excessive error count by both teams Saturday's match was of a far higher standard reflecting the improved status of both clubs. Old Alleynians gained promotion with a solitary blemish on their 2022-23 league record and are thriving at the higher level rather than struggling to acclimatise as is the case with many an elevated side. Their set piece scrummage was dominant in the first period and arguably had the upper hand throughout. Their back division has pace and quality and from the first minute they looked to play 15-man rugby. Ben Osuntokun was formidable and his ubiquitous presence became more apparent the longer the game continued. For the Black & Whites there was greater fluency and tempo in the first quarter which created the early advantage. In addition the scrambling and committed defence in their 22 frustrated their opponents. It was a match that could have gone either way but OAs finished the stronger side and at the eleventh hour broke through the Black & Whites defences for the vital score.

For Sutton & Epsom next Saturday is a rest weekend before the league campaign resumes on January 27th with the charabanc taking the team to Priestfields. In the reverse fixture an impressive Medway ran away 33-15 victors at Rugby Lane but in this league prior success appears to be almost irrelevant as a guide to form. In contrast next Saturday the Old Boys have to play their postponed fixture against Cobham. The visitors took exception to the playing surface at Dulwich Common and headed back to the Memorial Ground whilst the hosts enjoyed the afternoon watching their 3 rd XV play on the unplayable surface.

Sutton & Epsom:
Gareth O'Brien, Kyren Ghumra, Ross Parsons, Freddy Bunting ©, Ciaran Mohr, Tom Lennard, Steve Munford, Alex Mount, Chris Farrell, Tom Boaden, Josh Glanville, Ewan McTaggart, Rob Hegarty, Josh Pulvirenti & Matt Whitaker.
Replacements: Callum Gibson, Ben Green & Matt Symonds.

Old Alleynians
Josh Winduss, Tom Williams, Robert Outram, Andrew Jones-Davies, Rory Holford, Henry Dewing, Tristram Holden, Jeremiah Manning, Charles Thompson, Tom Weightman, Will Hinchcliffe, James Mair, Ben Osuntokun, Hadley Eames & Gillam Crouch.
Replacements: Cameron Saunders, Brian Lennard & Ollie Hobman.

Photo credit: Robin Kennedy

Battersea power ahead of local rugby team

9 April 2024

Battersea Ironsides 38 Sutton & Epsom RFC 29. Saturday 6th January.

In September at Rugby Lane Sutton & Epsom belatedly gained their first success of their campaign with a last gasp 26-25 win over the then league leader's Battersea Ironsides. Therefore the return fixture was anticipated with great relish. Before the kick off there was much disruption from the scheduled proceedings. Storm Henk had led to torrential midweek rains resulting in Battersea's Openview facilities being unplayable. Fortunately an alternative time and venue was found. The match was rescheduled for 4pm at the splendid Grasshoppers RFC venue. The crowd enjoyed the

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curtain-raiser at 2pm as HAC overcame Grasshoppers 22-14 in the parallel Regional 2 Thames League before settling in for the main event. A thrilling nine-try match ensued with the lead changing hands five times before Battersea Ironsides triumphed 38-29.

Sutton & Epsom suffered a setback in the warm up as Tom Lennard injured his back. The deck was reshuffled and Gareth O'Brien went to 10 and Austin Bell, returning from University, came off the bench to 15. The unfortunate Lennard, with all the mobility of an octogenarian, was ushered to the bench and was unlikely to play any part in proceedings unless some miracle worker happened to be strolling down Syon Lane. The game started under the floodlights with Battersea Ironsides immediately in the ascendancy. A try in the opening minute was denied as the hosts were held up over the line. Five minutes later blindside flanker Ollie Davies made the first of many penetrating breaks. From halfway he broke through the first defender then palmed off prospective tacklers who were scattered like skittles as he raced in to score. Charles Stuart regally added the conversion for a 7-0 lead.

The high tempo opening from the hosts continued as Charles Stuart added a penalty to extend the lead to 10-0. Moments later Sutton were on the scoreboard from the familiar efficiency of Freddy Bunting's boot as he added another penalty to his ever-increasing season's tally to make it 10-3. However, the errant Sutton defence yielded another penalty that enabled the hosts to regain their ten-point advantage to lead 13-3 a couple of minutes later. At the end of the first quarter Battersea Ironsides were rewarded for their dominant start to the match with their second try. This time it was Number 8 Tom Jeffs who forced his way past flailing defenders from ten metres out. The ball-carrying of Davies & Jeffs was to be the difference between the sides by the final whistle. Though Charles Stuart's conversion drifted harmlessly wide the Ironsides had a healthy advantage of 18-3 with the visitors starved of territory and possession.

The early ascendancy of the SW17 outfit was replaced by a sterling Sutton comeback. At last the Black & Whites put together some phases and excellent handling got them deep into the Battersea half. The opportunity looked to have been lost but the referee brought the game back for an earlier
offence. With the 15-point deficit Captain Bunting shunned the 3-point option and kicked to the corner. The gamble saw a rich reward. Josh Pulvirenti scored from close-range and Freddy Bunting added the conversion to trail 10-18. Though the S&E revival was soon deflated by another Charles Stuart penalty that saw the score at 21-10 the Black & Whites had a foothold in the game and were looking dangerous when they had possession.

With the interval rapidly approaching Sutton & Epsom enjoyed their best spell of the game as they went in search of a score before the break. Resolute and powerful tackling by the Battersea team held the line. However, under pressure the defence transgressed and they were reduced to 14 men. With the clock counting down in time added on in the first period finally flanker Rob Hegarty forced his way over following a 5-metre lineout. Freddy Bunting's conversion concluded the first half with Sutton closing the gap to 17-21.

The second half began with the Black & Whites confident that they could repeat the come from behind win they had enjoyed earlier this season. In contrast Battersea sought to regain the dominance they had enjoyed at the start of the game. As ever the opening score of the half would be vital for the hopes of both sides. Ten minutes into the second period Battersea kicked into the
Sutton half. Fullback Austin Bell gathered the ball and looked for an advantageous 50-22 kick. As the ball rolled towards the beneficial touch it trickled to a halt but Sutton's initial frustration was transformed into delight. Winger Kyren Ghumra arrived with the cover and his boot manage to nudge the ball to the Ironsides 22. He regained his footing gathered the loose ball and ran in unopposed. Freddy Bunting added the conversion and Sutton led 22-21.

If self-doubt had entered into the hosts it was soon dispelled as the redoubtable Tom Jeffs added to his account with his second try of the afternoon. A penalty was kicked to the corner and the 5-metre lineout was secured and ball was quickly transferred to Tom Jeffs who bulldozed his way over. Though the conversion was missed Battersea lead once more by 26-22. Sutton refused to be subdued and five minutes later they had regained lead. From a breakdown 15 metres from the line lock Ewan McTaggart gather the ball, broke through and sidestepped the last defender to score by the uprights. The towering second row is arguably S&E's most improved player this season and his try was greeted with joyous enthusiasm from the travelling support. With Freddy Bunting adding the extras the Black & Whites led 29-26 entering the final quarter.

Once more the Ironsides went in search of a try. Another penalty was kicked to the corner for a 5-metre lineout. The expectant home crowd bayed for a repeat dose of the medicine. Initially it appeared that the Sutton defences had frustrated the hosts on the line. After much delay and close inspection of the mass of humanity piled in front of him the referee raised his arm aloft to signal the try. Prop Henry Warby was awarded the crucial score. The pendulum had swung back in favour of Battersea and Charles Stuart's conversion put the hosts 33-29 ahead. A couple of minutes later the confused crowd saw Josh Glanville and a Battersea forward depart with yellow cards. It came to pass that Sir had been unimpressed by some pushing and shoving though the incident was less than what commuters experience boarding a rush hour tube and to onlookers it seemed a rather draconian response.

The topsy-turvy nature of the second half had fifteen minutes to go and the outcome was still in the balance. Sutton & Epsom went in search of the 22 and a platform to launch an attack on the Battersea line. Freddy Bunting's long penalty kick from hand, intended for the corner, was gathered infield and a mark called. The threat was averted and the Ironsides set out their stall in the visitors' half. In a rousing finish multiple attacks followed as last ditch tackles frustrated the hosts. Finally, Charles Stuart rounded off a fine performance as he dummied and sidestepped his way over the line for Battersea Ironside's fifth try of the afternoon. The score resulted in an unseemly fracas in the in-goal area. No further cards were issued with only a couple of minutes remaining but Battersea were awarded a penalty at the restart. For those who revel in the unusual it was rather disappointing that Charles Stuart did not attempt the extra three points but Battersea led 38-29 with a two score cushion.

There was no further addition to the score and the Ironsides had won a most exciting game 38-29. Messrs Davies and Jeffs had been outstanding for the victors carrying numerous times collecting considerable yardage as well as three tries. Sutton had looked dangerous in attack but their defence lacked the excellence of their Cobham away win and ultimately that was the deciding factor in a match played between two sides who were notably better than their earlier meeting this season. Next Saturday Sutton & Epsom host Old Alleynians who have started 2024 in splendid fashion by crushing London Cornish 50-17. When the two sides met at Dulwich Common in September the Old Boys edged out S&E 29-25.

Sutton & Epsom:
Austin Bell, Ciaran Mohr, Willem Ratu, Kyren Ghumra, Freddy Bunting ©, Gareth O'Brien, Ross Parsons, Tom Boaden, Chris Farrell, Alex Mount, Ewan McTaggart, Josh Glanville, Rob Hegarty, Josh Pulvirenti & Matt Whitaker.
Replacements: Callum Gibson & Ben Green. Unused: Tom Lennard.

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Battersea Ironsides
George Clair, Will Diamond, Ben Turner, Jacob Donovan, Mike Brennan, Charles Stuart, Jack Moates, Harry Martin, Ollie Lewis, Henry Warby, Archie MacPherson, Sam Reeves, Ollie Davies, Alex Chitan & Tom Jeffs.
Replacements: Harry Batson, Max Trickett & Cameron Baker.

Somewhat resigned by Reigatians

9 April 2024

Sutton & Epsom RFC 21 – Old Reigatian 38. Saturday 16th December.

In the reverse fixture Old Reigatian finally subdued a stubborn Sutton and Epsom 35-29 after a game of fluctuating fortunes. This time the Black & Whites were enjoying a run of five victories whilst the visitors were lying third and snapping at the heels of the leaders. For the hosts it was a red-letter day for hooker Chris Farrell who was celebrating his 100 th 1st XV league appearance. In stark contrast Ben Green was making his debut for S&E and was one of four changes to the starting line-up. Old Reigatian continued their upward trajectory with a very impressive 38-21 triumph.

Freddy Bunting kicked off with the wind favouring the hosts. Moments later he was impressively putting his team onto the front foot with a probing 50-22 kick. It was a fast and furious opening ten minutes as each side were eager to gain the early advantage. It was most competitive at the breakdown and both defences held firm. On the quarter hour Lawrence Elliott was adjudged to have obstructed the OR kicker as the ball rolled off the back of the pitch. The penalty was kicked into the corner. Sterling Sutton defence halted the visitors but they were brought back for another penalty. The second attempt improved on the dress rehearsal as a perfectly executed catch & drive saw prop Ciaran Nestor touch down for the first try of the afternoon. Lucas Overtoom stroked over the conversion for a 7-0 lead for OR.

#	Team	P	W	D	L	PF	PA	+/-	TB	LB	Pts
1	Beckenham	13	9	0	4	394	322	72	8	3	**47**
2	Old Reigatian	13	9	0	4	380	300	80	10	0	**46**
3	Battersea Ironsides	13	9	0	4	395	274	121	7	2	**45**
4	Reeds Weybridge	13	9	0	4	354	235	119	4	3	**43**
5	Old Colfeians	13	7	0	6	324	331	-7	5	2	**35**
6	Medway	13	7	0	6	290	338	-48	5	2	**35**
7	Old Alleynians	12	6	0	6	321	306	15	6	3	**33**
8	Sutton & Epsom	13	6	0	7	372	364	8	4	4	**32**
9	Cobham	12	5	0	7	319	343	-24	7	1	**28**
10	Gravesend	13	4	0	9	257	382	-125	4	3	**23**
11	Sidcup	13	3	0	10	283	353	-70	3	4	**19**
12	London Cornish	13	3	0	10	280	421	-141	4	2	**18**

England Rugby Regional 2 South East table

Top image: Chris Farrell playing in his 100th 2st XV league match. Credit Robin Kennedy.

Though the hosts pressed hard to get back on terms with a couple of visits to their opponents' 22 the men from the Geoffrey Knight Fields stood tall with an impregnable defence. S&E got to the line but were denied the chance to level the score as they lost possession at the critical juncture. In fact it was the team from Reigate who lifted the temporary siege and scored their second try with their second visit to the Sutton 22. On the half hour mark a sweeping play with great continuity provided by adept passes out of tackles saw Reigatian centre Gareth Stephens chip over the defence re-gather the ball and complete a stylish score. Though the conversion never threatened the uprights Old Reigatian had a healthy12-0 advantage.

Sutton & Epsom were in need of a score to get a foothold in the game and despite Willem Ratu charging ahead like Jehu support was not at hand to benefit from the break. Sutton did not aid their chances by conceding penalties and from one given for a high tackle the Reigate side kicked

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into the corner. Despite spoiling the lineout the loose ball was touched down in the host's in-goal area resulting in a 5-metre scrum to OR. A fine tackle by Josh Pulvirenti and a knock on appeared to have saved S&E but once more the referee brought the sides back to an earlier infringement by the Rugby Lane XV. Following another scrummage and multiple carries Max Coyle popped over from short-range. Lucas Overtoom added the extras for a 19-0 lead.

A thoroughly downcast home team restarted and promptly conceded a soft score. The kick was taken and returned with a vengeance through apologetic tackles. Gareth O'Brien's attempt to clear the ball from his 22 was impeded and the voracious hands of the visitors collected the loose ball. It was relayed to lock Jack Baart who powered in at the corner. The touchline conversion bisected the uprights and Old Reigatian led 26-0 with a bonus point already in their back pocket. Timely words were uttered under the Sutton posts and the hosts desperately attempted to get a score before the interval but to no avail. OR turned around 26-0 ahead leaving S&E with an Everest-like challenge to maintain their winning run.

It is the modern vogue for coaches and pundits alike to highlight the conversion rate for teams when visiting their opponents' 22. For sorry Sutton the first half recorded 0% whilst Old Reigatian were on 100%. In addition the normally faultless Bunting boot had erred twice. The 26-0 deficit may not have accurately reflected the balance of the game but it highlighted that one side was ruthlessly clinical whilst the other was most profligate. The Black & Whites held back on making changes at the break no doubt planning to get an early score to exert maximum pressure on the visitors. They would have to reverse the trend of the first period and take every opportunity to score if they were going to get anything out of this fixture.

An early score for the hosts was not only essential to make a contest of the match but also for Sutton's self-belief. However, within five minutes the visitors were crossing the whitewash for a fifth time. A kick through, a ricochet and a helpful assist from a Black & White boot gifted Gareth Stephens his second try. Despite the missed conversion Old Reigatian looked over the horizon and far away leading 31-0. Sutton & Epsom rang the changes as Alex Mount returned to the fray and Ross Parsons had his first taste of action replacing Chris Ballard. A few minutes later George London was the last pair of fresh legs as Isaac Lea took a breather. Two penalties on the bounce to the home team propelled the Rugby Lane team to a lineout 10 metres out. Though they were thwarted this time another penalty meant they had a second chance from a 5-metre lineout. The forwards controlled the ball and the try was scored. It could not have been a more popular try as it was the outstretched arm of Chris Farrell on his 100 th appearance who touched down. Freddy Bunting added the conversion for 7-31.

Ten minutes later Sutton & Epsom were again benefiting from Reigatian indiscipline as they kicked a penalty into the corner. From the five-metre lineout the visitors defiant defence thwarted initial attempts until Alex Mount side-stepped would be tacklers to score. Freddy Bunting added the extras as the home crowd dared to dream of a miracle at 14-31. Those dreams swiftly became a nightmare as the Black & Whites conceded an interception try just outside their 22 a minute later. Max Coyle had his second try and Lucas Overtoom his fourth conversion and the visitors had the healthy cushion again leading 38-14.

Sutton were not finished and it was Alex Mount who scored again. If the prop's first try owed much to nimble footwork his second was from brute force and determination as he muscled his was over the line. Freddy Bunting did the necessary to trail 21-38. With ten minutes remaining there began the game within the game as the Black & Whites went in search of bonus points as one more try would secure at least one consolation point. Though the hosts dominated territory and possession they failed to add to their tally. The resolute Old Reigatian defence were in no mood for any charitable Christmas presents for their opponents. The final whistle concluded the contest with OR victors by the commanding margin of 38-21 and excellent value for their success. Old Reigatian played splendidly with a ruthless efficiency. Once again their three-quarters were of the highest quality playing with confidence, fluency and an enviable slickness with Max Coyle a constant threat. Their pack had the edge in the set scrum and were disruptive at the breakdown with Finlay Lock, like all good 7s, a constant irritation. In defence they tackled forcefully and closed down Sutton rapidly. However, it was their ability to convert pressure in the 22 into points that was the key difference. For S&E too often their breaks by Willem Ratu et al lacked support. Most frustratingly speculative offloads were lured into the hands of their opponents as if they were victims of sirens without an Odysseus to rescue them. The result had far more to do with the quality of the play of the Old Reigatian team than the failings of Sutton and the win has put the visitors very much in the title race.

The league enters its festive break and returns with Sutton's trip to Battersea Ironsides on 6 th January. If one is looking for a barometer for how competitive this league has become there is no other league in England that is topped by a team with four defeats but in Regional 2 South East there are four clubs with a nine-four win-loss record. For S&E lest we forget that their campaign has been transformed with five wins from the last six starts and the Rugby Lane faithful should approach 2024 with cautious optimism.

Sutton & Epsom:
Gareth O'Brien, Matt Symonds, Willem Ratu, Tom Lennard, Lawrence Elliott, Freddy Bunting ©, Tom Boaden, Chris Farrell, Alex Mount, Ewan McTaggart, Ben Green, Isaac Lea, Josh Pulvirenti & Rob Hegarty.
Replacements: Callum Gibson, George London & Ross Parsons.

Old Reigatian:
Conor Woods, Harrison Mitchell, Gareth Stephens, Max Coyle, Finn Coyle, Lucas Overtoom, Alex Skinner, Ciaran Nestor, Harry Plowman, Toby Collister, Oli Brooks, Jack Baart, Sam Foreman, Finlay Lock & Ryan Travers.
Replacements: David Niven, Ed Cox & Ben Holder.

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