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Top dog toppled in windy contest

11 December 2023

Beckenham RFC 22 – Sutton & Epsom RFC 26. Saturday 9th December.

Saturday marked the start of the home stretch with the first of the reverse fixtures. In Week 2 both teams endured testing temperatures in the crucible of Rugby Lane to produce an extraordinary game of extremely fluctuating fortunes. The denouement included the ecstasy of a penalty try to Beckenham and the agony of a last second penalty drift wide for Sutton as the visitors won 42-41. At least the teams were spared Arctic weather for the rematch at Balmoral Avenue. Many players had crossed the whitewash since that September Saturday and the Kent Club sat atop of Regional 2 South East whilst the men from Surrey arrived with four consecutive wins under their belt. After an enthralling contest Sutton gained their most impressive scalp of the season as they won 26-22.

Sutton & Epsom offered a warm welcome back to Tom Lennard after his highly successful jaunt in the Antipodes. The playmaker not only starred for Melbourne University gaining representative honours but also encouraged Josh Pulvirenti to join him at S&E. If Tom was the Australian addition New Zealand was represented by the returning Willem Ratu. So the domestic unions did not feel overlooked Sutton even selected a Welshman in Ross Parsons. The weather once again played a significant role in the fixture with a tremendous wind billowing down the pitch. Freddy Bunting kicked off with the gale behind him and Sutton went on the offensive from the very start but their swift attacks were matched by the swarming defence of the hosts. Though the leaders gave up an early penalty in front of the uprights. With a prostrate player holding the ball in place and the posts swaying in the wind Captain Bunting made it 3-0.

Beckenham gave an early warning to the visitors of the quality of their back play as Tom Bateman linked with Matt Lovell to bring the leaders deep into the Sutton 22 but their efforts were thwarted by conceding a penalty. After ten minutes S&E had doubled their lead to 6-0 with another Bunting penalty but they were frustrated that a fine attack had not resulted in a try. At the end of the first quarter Matt Whitaker's desperate bid to force his way over by the posts was held up by resilient defenders. The elements made it extremely difficult for the hosts to exit from their 22 but their well organised defence frustrated the Black & White backs. On the half hour Tom Lennard hacked through a loose ball and gathered it up and a couple of strides short of glory he was tackled. The referee ruled it a high tackle and with no other defender in view he awarded a penalty try and Sutton led 13-0.

The leaders then enjoyed their best passage of play as their forwards and backs combined with multiple phases to get into the Sutton 22. Impressive offloads in the tackle maintained the momentum and then they opted to kick ahead. On any other afternoon it would have been a worthwhile gamble but the ball was gathered by Freddy Bunting and despatched on the wind 60 metres back down the paddock. The visitors pressed hard to extend their lead and thought they were about to score again from a 5-metre scrum when Gareth O'Brien was penalised. With time running out in the first half Willem Ratu countered towards the 22. His run earned another penalty which Freddy Bunting readily converted to conclude the half with a 16-0 lead.

As both sides retired to the warmth of the dressing rooms for directions from their coaches everyone pondered just how many points the wind was worth. In addition to the elements Beckenham had survived 10 minutes with 14 men after a yellow card to stand off Gary Dipple. The leaders had done extremely well to frustrate the Black & Whites who, for all their territory and possession, only scored a solitary try. Sutton knew that they would need to be at their very best in the second half to withstand the inevitable siege to come.

The Blamoral Avenue crowd did not have long to wait to cheer the success of their local heroes. A Sutton fumble on their 22 from the restart put the hosts in prime position to chip away at the lead. S&E conceded a penalty at the scrum and Geordie Boyce stepped up to chip over the conversion for 3-16. Beckenham pressed hard for further additions. A Gareth O'Brien tackle thwarted one attack and the pack stole a scrum ball on their 22. However, the clearance kick was run back with a vengeance. The Kent side were within 5 metres and flung out a long pass. Lock Ciall Kirwan was hugging the touchline and did superbly to take the pass on his laces to score in the corner. Unsurprisingly the touchline conversion was blown off course but the Sutton lead was now 16-8 with 30 minutes remaining.

With errors mounting in the Sutton play and confidence surging through the veins of the league leaders the momentum had definitely shifted. It was now that Sutton & Epsom demonstrated not only great character but also their best play. The howitzer boot of Bunting thumped a penalty into the 22 to give his team a promising lineout. The catch and drive advanced the ball into threatening territory. Following multiple phases and admirable control by the pack finally Matt Whitaker was ushered over the line for the try. The kick adjacent to the uprights was converted and S&E led by 23-8. The men from Rugby Lane continued to attack in search of another try. As per the first period the Beckenham defence held firm but once again the referee brought play back for a penalty. Once more the irrepressible Bunting extended the lead to 26-8 as the game entered the final quarter.

Considering the playing conditions this was a most impressive phase of play from the visitors who continued on the offensive not only carrying well but when required kicking penalties into the 22. At this stage centre Tane Feldhaus-Davies gave voice to his frustration with the number of offside penalties that his team were accumulating as he let fly with colourful language as he enquired to the heavens as to the precise number of offences. With ten minutes remaining Beckenham scored a quite outstanding try as fullback Francesco Pennacchia made a stunning break from his own half and linked with his support. A wave of Beckenham shirts burst into the Sutton 22 and captain Hans Laud-Anderson, like every quality 7, was on hand to add the finishing touch. Geordie Boyce added the extras for 26-15.

Roared on by a sizeable and passionate crowd the game was now turned on its head and it was the Surrey team who had to show their defensive mettle. It was the turn of the visitors to concede penalties. Beckenham opted for a 5-metre scrum and the result was another penalty and a yellow card not to a prop but to flanker Rob Hegarty and the leaders opted for the tap penalty. The ball was given to replacement prop James Cleverly with his mane like Samson, the beard of a lumberjack and a physique that shuns the modern figure-hugging apparel he bounced off the first tackler, sidestepped through a gap and strode over for a most accomplished solo effort. With

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Geordie Boyce chipping over the conversion the Sutton lead was only 26-22.
The crowd were in full voice and expectations running high as Sutton had five minutes to survive. In recent times the expression game management has not been linked with flattering adjectives for the Black & Whites but they now relentlessly held onto possession through multiple phases near halfway with a prodigious effort by the forwards. Then a shrill blast of the whistle and the hosts were given a lifeline of a penalty. The Gods smiled down benevolently on S&E as the kick went through the in-goal area. A grateful Sutton accepted a scrum on halfway and moments later ran down the clock to gain a fabulous 26-22 victory.
That made it five wins in a row for Sutton and to inflict the first defeat on the table-toppers at Balmoral Avenue this season was a notable achievement. The Beckenham backs are formidable not only in attack but also in defence. The leaders ability to pass out of the tackle is a most potent weapon but S&E matched their lofty opponents and it was their ability to play so well against the wind that was the deciding factor. Freddie Bunting's accumulation of points is well known but in this game it was the power of his kicking from hand that caught the eye. However, in truth it was a great team performance, as is often the way in harsh weather, that was the backbone for this latest win. It would be remiss not to mention the magnificent hospitality offered at Balmoral Avenue with the clubhouse bar one of the finest locations around to enjoy the traditional pleasures for which rugby is renowned.
Probably with a sense of relief to players, coaches and administrators next Saturday sees the last league match of 2023 and the competition adjourns for the festive break. For those readers who still prefer the High Street to online purchasing but are looking for an excuse to escape the horrors of Christmas shopping I can heartily recommend Sutton's game against Old Reigatian at Rugby Lane that kicks off at 2pm.
Sutton & Epsom:
Gareth O'Brien, Kyren Ghumra, Willem Ratu, Tom Lennard, Ciaran Mohr, Freddy Bunting ©, Ross Parsons, Tom Boaden, Chris Farrell, Alex Mount, Ewan McTaggart, Josh Glanville, Rob Hegarty, Josh Pulvirenti & Matt Whitaker. Replacements: Callum Gibson, Jack Howes & Matt Symonds.

Beckenham:
Francesco Pennacchia, Tom Bateman, Matt Lovell, Tane Feldhaus-Davies, Geordie Boyce, Gary Dipple, Ben Murphy, Lamar Sinclair, Liam Markey, Graham Murray, Ciall Kirwan, Josh Hiscott, Conor Palmer, Hans Laud-Anderson © & Oliver Stapelton.
Replacements: James Cleverly, Thomas Ward & Jed Hamilton

Unflagging Bunting clinches victory at the end

11 December 2023

Sutton & Epsom RFC 21 Old Colfeians 17 Saturday 2nd December.

Old Colfeians arrived at Rugby Lane as the form team in the league with five victories on the spin. Meanwhile a resurgent Sutton & Epsom had won all their three November fixtures and were equally confident. Both squads were hit by injuries and illness with S&E giving a debut to Matt Symonds on the wing. The last time the Black & Whites played OCs in 2007 the Kent side managed to record the only blemish on James Clark's perfect season. Fixtures between the two clubs go back 50 years and in the league era the matches have always been keenly contested and Saturday was no exception with Sutton winning 21-17.

There was a serious risk that the freezing weather might sabotage the game but a moderately milder morning, temperatures being above zero, meant that the crowd would not be disappointed. Freddy Bunting set the game in motion and the visitors immediately demonstrated their superlative form with the opening score after five minutes. Having spun the ball wide to both flanks the forwards took over in the 22. Phase after phase they remorselessly advanced under the posts until prop Tom Rameaux powered over. Chris Harris added the simple conversion for a 7-0 lead. In the early exchanges the powerful pack of the visitors initially held the upper hand in the set scrum but the host's lineout was more efficient and also disrupted the Colfeians ball. Both sets of backs looked threatening when they had possession and expectations of a closely fought encounter, that had been anticipated before the kick off, were being fully justified.

In the closing moments of the first quarter Sutton had an attacking lineout. Josh Pulvirenti took the ball and the pack advanced. The referee noted an indiscretion by the visitors but he played the advantage and was soon raising his arm to signal Rob Hegarty's try. Freddy Bunting's conversion cleared the uprights but just drifted wide as S&E trailed 5-7. The game was being played at a furious pace with both sides tenaciously contesting the breakdown forcing turnovers and errors. On the half hour S&E had another opportunity with a 5-metre lineout. The ball was safely secured and Matt Whitaker exploded from the pack powering over the line with would be tacklers hanging off him. Normal service resumed as Freddy Bunting added the extras to put his team into a 12-7 lead.

Old Colfeians reply was immediate and the Sutton lead short lived. With commendable adventure they ran a penalty from halfway and advanced to the S&E 22. The jinking Chris Harris took over to score a stylish solo effort. He was unable to add the conversion to his try but the Kent team were level at 12-12. Before the interval the Sutton back division that had already endured three changes before the start had another set back as Steve Munford was forced off through injury to be replaced by the versatile Jack Howes. The momentum had shifted to the visitors and Chris Harris came off his wing to create the overlap and the OCs surged from their 22 but the Sutton cover forced a knock on. The half concluded with the Black & Whites pressing hard but undone by an error in the opposition 22 and there was no further addition to the score and the sides turned around at 12 apiece.

Sutton & Epsom were fast out of the blocks in the second half from a lineout it was a vintage run from Matt Whitaker carrying the ball 40 metres. Sadly, the talismanic eight had outrun his support

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but soon had the consolation of a penalty. From a central position near halfway Freddy Bunting thumped the ball between the posts for a 15-12 lead. Once again the visitors responded with an assault on the Sutton 22 with the sidestepping Chris Harris to the fore. Alex Mount conceded a penalty but immediately made amends by winning a turnover from the quickly taken play. S&E replaced Tom Boaden with Callum Gibson, who is a man of considerable 'avoirdupois' whose 140kg frame might turn a deck-chair to match-wood, to add ballast to the front row. In addition their lineout with the catch and drive was becoming a potent weapon.

The weather began to deteriorate as not only did the temperature plummet but also a fog began to descend and gradually envelop proceedings. As Colfeians sought parity they probed the 22 and were awarded a penalty for a Ghumra knock on. Chris Harris went for the three-point option but
hooked his kick. In stark contrast a couple of minutes later Sutton were awarded a penalty on the halfway line on the angle with a distance in excess of 50 metres. With a truly magnificent strike Freddy Bunting bisected the posts. The strike was greeted with rapturous applause from the crowd as much for the 18-12 lead as for the opportunity to warm their hands.

As had been the case throughout the match the men from Horn Park responded at once in the grand manner. Winning a kickable penalty they opted to kick for the corner. They won the lineout and after sustained pressure the ball was transferred to hooker Daniel Orubo who dismissively broke through the tacklers to score. With the conversion going awry there was now only a solitary point in the game with Sutton & Epsom holding the advantage at 18-17. With the game entering the final quarter and so finely poised the hosts now played their best rugby of the match. With a slender lead the key is to play in the opposition's half and they proceeded to dominate the territorial battle.

The game opened up and Sutton scrum half Chris Ballard became more influential making sniping breaks and playing at a high tempo. From one counter the 9 won a penalty and took the quick tap which instigated multiple attacks from the Rugby Lane XV. Colfeians defensive resolve was impressive as they managed to halt Kyren Ghumra in the corner and the hosts were held up over the line. S&E were then gifted a great chance by a careless knock in the 22. From the scrum Matt Whitaker headed for glory. Once more the Horn Park men stood firm and Sutton were held up over the line. The visibility deteriorated and the distant Clubhouse was shrouded in fog. A shrill blast of Tobias Whitney's whistle indicated another penalty for Sutton. Freddy Bunting stepped up and hammered it home for a 21-17 lead with a couple of minutes of normal time remaining.

Up to this point Sutton had been exemplary on receipt of the restarts but at this vital stage they gave away a penalty. The visitors, conscious of the clock, turned down a shot at goal. Now the anxiety of the crowd as much as the fog descended on Rugby Lane as they knew another Colfeians try would see them take the lead. As they tried to work an overlap on the 22 Kyren Ghumra made a priceless interception. From the subsequent Sutton scrum the hosts failed to find touch and invited more pressure on themselves but forced a knock on with thunderous tackle. S&E conceded a penalty from the scrum and OCs turned the screw by opting for another scrum. Their followed a commendable moment of tactical acumen as the home team replaced their hooker with a prop. The beefed up Black & White pack drove their opponents off the ball and were awarded a penalty which was greeted by the loudest cheer of the day. Bunting kicked to touch, the lineout was secured and the clock was run down before the ball was kicked to the grandstand. Sutton had won this epic encounter 21-17.

The excellence of Freddy Bunting's placekicking had made the vital the difference. The Colfeians powerful forwards with the outstanding Number 8 Conor Gray had an influential afternoon with Chris Harris their creative hub in the backs. However, Sutton & Epsom played with steely determination that bodes well for the rest of the season. Once again they raised their game in the second half with their collective desire epitomised by debutant Matt Symonds' nerveless display. This is the midpoint of the season and the reverse fixtures begin next Saturday with a trip to Balmoral Avenue to take on leaders Beckenham. Back in September on that remarkably hot day the Kent side won 42-41. It will be another stern test for the Black & Whites especially as their hosts will no doubt be smarting from having just lost to bottom of the table Sidcup.

Sutton & Epsom:
Gareth O'Brien, Kyren Ghumra, Steve Munford, Ciaran Mohr, Matt Symonds, Freddy Bunting ©, Chris Ballard, Tom Boaden, Chris Farrell, Alex Mount, Ewan McTaggart, Josh Glanville, George London, Josh Pulvirenti & Rob Hegarty.
Replacements: Callum Gibson, Ben Tame & Jack Howes.

Old Colfeians:
Ryan Napper, Louis Baker, Miles Jones, Victor Spaczil, Chris Harris, Will Smith, Jed Wylie, Tom Rameaux, Daniel Orubo, Lloyd Evans, Andy O'Mailey, Leo Cunningham, Ethan Collins, Jake Carter & Conor Gray.
Replacements: Bamidele Agorioge, Frank Blythe & Ollie Burkett.

Image courtesy Robin Kennedy

Genuine victory on synthetic surface

11 December 2023

Cobham 16 **Sutton & Epsom** RFC 44. Saturday 18th November. Being the last league fixture in November the S&E squad had a rather Edwardian appearance as if they were members of the Epsom Amateur Dramatic Club cast preparing for a performance of 'Journey's End'. However, their Movember charitable generosity did not extend to the rugby pitch as they impressively defeated a more than capable Cobham XV by 44-16. On a gloomy afternoon blissfully free from precipitation Cobham kicked off the match on their pristine synthetic surface.

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The hosts had amassed 140 points so far this campaign from their three home victories and were one of a trio of clubs on 27 points looking to close the gap on the top two of Beckenham and Battersea Ironsides. The Memorial Ground men made a confident start as their large, athletic and mobile forwards provided plenty of possession for their quicksilver backs. The home team's high tempo game was matched by excellent defence as Sutton and Epsom's best play was thwarted by an impenetrable wall on the opposition 22. The Fairmile Lane side pressed hard for an opening score as a vital mark five metres from the S&E line denied them a try. Moments later Cobham had the consolation of a scrummage penalty in front of the posts and Jonny Holmes opened their account for a 3-0 lead.

After fifteen minutes the hosts were finally rewarded for their early dominance with a try. Despite valiant defence on their line the Cobham pack would not be denied and hooker Andrew Murphy forced his way over from close-range. Though the conversion drifted wide the home team held an 8-0 advantage. For supporters of the Black & Whites there had been precious little attacking play to cheer but the restart provided them with their first try. The alert Chris Farrell gathered the loose ball and burst into the 22 and a few phases later Josh Pulvirenti exploded from the ruck to run in under the posts. Freddy Bunting chipped over the simplest of conversions to make it 7-8. A couple of minutes later Willem Ratu swooped on the ball and ran it in from 60 metres to score by the uprights. Captain Bunting did the necessary and S&E now led 14-8 at the end of the first quarter.

Cobham might have felt a tad aggrieved that the scoreboard did not reflect the balance of the game. To their credit they responded in the classical manner with a try of their own. A perfectly flighted kick descended from the leaden sky just outside the Sutton and Epsom 22 and Jordan Huie was greeted by the ball and an opponent. It was the hosts turn to scoop up the loose ball and punish the back-pedalling visitors as prop Luke Bliss burrowed his way over the line for the try. The extras were not added but the home team now trailed by a solitary point, 13-14. Sutton made early changes as Ben Tame and Tom Boaden replaced George London and Callum Gibson. The momentum of the match had shifted back in favour of the hosts as their swarming defence harried Garerth O'Brien and won another penalty in front of the posts. Jonny Holmes gratefully accepted the three points and Cobham held a 16-14 lead.

With 10 minutes remaining in the first half Sutton & Epsom enjoyed their best period of play. An impressive catch and drive from the lineout saw them advance to the line and force a penalty. The ball was kicked to the corner for the 5-metre lineout but there was to be no repeat of the forward efficiency and a knock on gave the hosts an opportunity to clear their lines. A lengthy clearance was skilfully trapped by Jordan Huie who ran the ball back and won a penalty. The irrepressible Bunting made it 17-16 for S&E. In the dying embers of the first period Cobham had a lineout on the Sutton 22 and the platform to edge ahead once more. However, Ewan McTaggart stole the ball to initiate a counterattack. The ball went wide and was twice kicked ahead and Lawrence Elliott was on hand to score in the corner. Freddy Bunting made the touchline conversion look anything but challenging and the referee blew his whistle and the teams turned around with Sutton & Epsom leading 24-16.

After a half of high quality rugby that had been most competitive from the first minute none of the assembled crowd would have risked a wager on the outcome as the game was very much in the balance. From the restart Cobham gathered the ball and launched a speculative Garry Owen that resulted in a mid-air collision on halfway and chaos. The ball was hacked forward as S&E struggled to control it until Willem Ratu touched down over his line. After that escape it was Sutton who were the first to open their account in the second period when they were awarded a scrummage penalty. Freddy Bunting knocked it over from 45 metres to extend the lead to 27-16.

The hosts then dominated territory and possession for the next ten minutes. Earlier in the season S&E's defensive frailties would have seen them conceding tries but the defence now on show was unrecognisable from those autumnal days. The tackling was ferocious and forced handling errors in an impressive collective show of cussed defiance. The next visit to the hosts' half resulted in another penalty and another long-range success for the boot of Bunting as the Rugby Lane men led 30-16 with the game in the final quarter.

As determined as the Cobham attacks were they were trumped by the excellence of the Sutton defence. The visitors not only halted the hosts in their tracks but were making turnovers and counterattacking with relish. With pace on both flanks and confidence in abundance the Black and Whites turned defence into attack. The Memorial Ground XV were equally resolute and threw everything at Sutton in an effort to get back into the game. A glimmer of hope was extinguished with another obliterating tackle by Jordan Huie in the corner. The winger then showed his attacking qualities by carrying the ball into the opposition half and won a penalty. Captain Bunting opted for the kick to the corner and he was rewarded with a try. The 5-metre lineout was taken and the forwards muscled their way over the line and Ben Tame emerged as the scorer. Freddy Bunting caressed over the conversion for 37-16 and the Black & Whites had secured the bonus point for their fourth try.

Once again Chris Farrell regained the restart and initiated a thrilling Sutton attack. A crossfield kick was secured by Jordan Huie who strode towards the 22 and linked with Chris Ballard. The momentum was maintained by a superb piece of support running by lock Ewan McTaggart and the ball was spun wide to Willem Ratu who finished with aplomb in the corner. Freddy Bunting maintained his perfect kicking afternoon taking his personal tally to 19 points as his team lead by 44-16. In time added on there was still time for more thrills and spills. Once more a Cobham attack floundered on the Black & White wall in the S&E 22 and a devastating counter ensued. Freddy Bunting ran from his own half down the wing with deceptive pace that left the would be pursuer clutching a pulled hamstring. The Sutton 10 opted to run over the last defender rather than go round him and as he tumbled to the ground and juggled the ball the referee ruled a knock on as he popped the ball up to a supporting player. The game concluded in the Cobham half with no further addition to the score. Sutton had won 44-16 to record their second bonus point success on the road in consecutive weeks and make it three wins on the bounce.

This was by a margin the finest match of the Sutton season so far. The Cobham side from the first minute to the last carried a serious attacking threat. The front row triumvirate of Messrs Murphy, Bliss and Lippiatt were mightily impressive at the set piece. The home forwards carried with pace and aggression and the backs spread the ball well. However, the deciding factor in the contest was the excellence of the Sutton defence which not only stopped numerous attacks but forced errors and countered with great effect. It was truly a marvellous team performance with the side relishing their defensive duties as much as they enjoyed running with the ball. The second half effort to shut out the quality Cobham XV and to win it 20-0 was most impressive.

Next Saturday is another rest weekend and the campaign continues on 2 nd December when Old Colfeians visit rugby Lane for the 2pm kick off. It promises to be a splendid match as the visitors are enjoying a purple patch having won their last five fixtures. It will also be the 50 th anniversary of the first time the clubs met and their first league meeting since 2007.

Willem The Conqueror brings victory to local rugby side

11 December 2023

London Cornish 24 Sutton & Epsom RFC 53, Saturday 11th November. It had been a decade since these two clubs had met in a league fixture and only a point separated them this season in the nether regions of the table. Having defeated bottom club Sidcup the previous Saturday Sutton travelled with optimism and were buoyed by the arrival of centre Willem Ratu from New Zealand who was making his debut. The hosts after weeks of hampered availability were also content that they were fielding their best combination so far this campaign.

At the final whistle it was Sutton &; Epsom who took the spoils with a 53-24 bonus point victory. This ended a winless streak of 16 away league fixtures for the Black &; Whites stretching back to the thrilling Tring 21-20 triumph of March 2022.

On a chill but still afternoon Freddy Bunting initiated proceedings in sunshine under a bright blue sky following a minute's silence for Remembrance Day. London Cornish have endured a hideous run of injuries and their misfortune continued after the first ruck that forced them to bring on Mathew Hand for Tony Pellow and reshuffle their front row. London Cornish's attempt to clear from their 22 was spoiled by Ewan McTaggart using all of his Brobdingnagian stature to charge down the kick then he adroitly transferred the ball to Robbie Martey who offloaded to Josh Pulvirenti to score his first 1 st XV try. Freddy Bunting added the extras for a 7-0 lead. S&;E barely had time to reflect on their perfect opening before the hosts drew level. Having forced their way into the 22 they were awarded a penalty that was quickly taken and scrum half Findlay Tweedie scored by the uprights. Michael Edworthy added the simple conversion for 7-7.

Sutton pressed hard to regain the advantage and seemed to have wasted an opportunity but the referee brought play back for a penalty in front of the sticks and Freddy Bunting made it 10-7. Moments later they extended their lead with their second goal of the afternoon. Another kick clipped Black & White hands foreshortening the clearance enabling Gareth O'Brien to gather the ball in centre field. The ball was transferred to Willem Ratu who ran it in from 40 metres with clinical efficiency and devastating pace. Captain Bunting bisected the uprights for a 17-7 lead.

Moments later he was caressing another penalty over the bar for 20-7 to end the first quarter. In the next ten minutes the men in Black &; Gold had a chance to get back within a score. Fly half Michael Edworthy was successful with his first penalty but his second attempt drifted wide so London Cornish trailed 10-20 with ten minutes remaining of the first period as they enjoyed their best spell in the game. Sutton broke the shackles courtesy of another erroneous kick. A penalty failed to find touch and Robbie Martey returned it with interest. Soon Willem Ratu was offloading to Chris Farrell and the hooker set off for the line only to be denied by a wonderful covering tackle and the observant visiting touch judge who spotted he put a foot in touch when diving for the corner. It was then the Surrey men who suffered a charge down in their 22 but they escaped unpunished. In the dying embers of the first half Sutton secured their third try. Willem Ratu released Jordan Huie who showed great strength in the 22 before Ewan McTaggart advanced it to the line. The recycled ball came to Gareth O'Brien five metres out who stepped inside and was tackled but managed to reach for the line and score. Freddy Bunting concluded the half with the conversion and Sutton &; Epsom led 27-10.

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This was familiar territory for London Cornish, in the previous round they trailed at the break by 22-0 at Cobham before a storming 4-try second half brought them to the verge of a classic win. However, it was not long before the Rugby Lane team were extending their lead as they secured a bonus point with their fourth try two minutes into the second period. Willem Ratu n a flurry of surging limbs swatted away touchline tacklers and ran the ball in from his own 22 and the Bunting boot made it 34-10. As with the first half the hosts swiftly replied. This time it was a forward effort rounded off by captain Alex Davey from short-range. Ciaran Johnston took over the kicking duties from the injured Mike Edworthy and reduced the lead to 34-17.

For the Rugby Lane followers of a pessimistic disposition their fears were immediately allayed. Sutton claimed the restart and carried the ball to the Cornish 22 where Alex Mount made the telling break before passing to Rob Hegarty to do the honours. The simple conversion was completed and the scoreboard indicated S&;E were 41-17 up within ten minutes of the second half.

The Black & Whites replaced Steve Munford at 9 with Chris Ballard and Tom Boaden swapped with Alex Mount at prop. London Cornish were far from subdued and threw everything at their opponents with winger Rob Mackay a constant threat coming off his wing numerous times zigzagging his way through would be tacklers. The Sutton & Epsom defence held firm with Matt Whitaker’s magnificent tackle holding up his opponent over the line.

The next score went to Sutton and Willem Ratu completed his hat trick. He ran into the 22 and appeared to be halted as he stumbled but he rolled over regained his feet and ran in to score.

There followed a collector’s item… a missed kick by Bunting as the visitors held a 46-17 advantage. The visitors were now at full throttle. They were held up over the line, a kick ahead was cleared by the scrambling defence and Matt Whitaker was halted from a five-metre scrum. But with ten minutes remaining it looked as if Rob Mackay was going to get his reward for his afternoon’s endeavours. He strode towards the corner but was brought down with glory within his grasp by Jordan Huie. In years gone by it would have been acclaimed as a great cover tackle but in this season of the experimental new law it was a high tackle, yellow card and a penalty try.

S&E’s penchant for the penalty try has seen five in eight outings and has now reached epidemic proportions as the Cornish trailed 24-46. With the numerical advantage they eyed the opportunity for a bonus point for a fourth try before the match concluded.

Once more the Rugby Lane XV regained the restart and advance to the 22. A tremendous scrummage provided the perfect platform to exploit a generous blindside. Matt Whitaker picked up at 8 drew the defender and Chris Ballard waltzed in for his first Sutton try. Normal service resumed as Freddy Bunting converted to bring his personal tally to 18 points and the score to 53-24. For the remainder of the game the hosts went in search of the valuable bonus point but the visitors showed the same determination in defence as they had in attack. Despite the extra man London Cornish were not able to create a clear cut opportunity and the game ended with no further addition to the score. Sutton &; Epsom had finally ended their away day woes and won handsomely 53-24.

Willem Ratu was outstanding on debut not only scoring a hat trick but also his passing and tackling were of the highest quality. As is often the case when an exceptional player is added into the mix it elevates the players around him. Ewan McTaggart had his finest game, Chris Farrell revelled in his role out wide and Robbie Martey racked up impressive stats for players passed and metres made. The travelling supporters were delighted to see the Black &; Whites playing once more with pace, power and confidence and are now relishing the remainder of the season. London Cornish never took a backward step but were hindered by losing two of their front five within the first 10 minutes. Notable in a losing cause were Number 8 Adam Wheeler who carried relentlessly and Rob Mackay who was dangerous whenever he got the ball.

Next Saturday Sutton are on the road again when they visit the Memorial Ground to play high-flying Cobham who are fourth in the league only trailing Reeds Weybridge on points difference.

Sutton & Epsom:

Gareth O’Brien, Robbie Martey, Willem Ratu, Lawrence Elliott, Jordan Huie, Freddy Bunting , Steve Munford, Callum Gibson, Chris Farrell, Alex Mount, Ewan McTaggart, Josh Glanville,****George London, Josh Pulvirenti &; Matt Whitaker.

Replacements: Tom Boaden, Rob Hegarty &; Chris Ballard.

London Cornish

Ben Boorman, Robert Mackay, Kyle Hughes, Peter Brogden, George Bromage, Michael Edworthy, Findlay Tweedie, Tony Pellow, Oscar Cruz, Rory Ling, David Chalkey, Tom Carr, Alex Davey ©,****Jack Waving &; Adam Wheeler.

Replacements: Mathew Hand, Mark Osei-Tutu &; Ciaran Johnston.

Sutton and Epsom sink Sidcup

11 December 2023

Sutton & Epsom RFC 30 – Sidcup 20. Saturday 4th November. Regional 2 South East is a most competitive league where any side can overturn its opponent so giving hope to supporters every Saturday afternoon. However, for the followers of Sutton and Sidcup they knew only too well that on occasion you have to win games. This campaign had witnessed only a solitary success for both camps and this fixture was therefore a meeting of the damned duo in terms of relegation spots. To the unaffiliated observer the game may have had the appearance of two bald men fighting over a comb but to these two proud clubs meeting under strained circumstances it was a match of the utmost importance. The result would lead to the bells ringing out for both clubs whether they were the alarm variety of relegation or angelic church ones heralding success was still to be determined. By the final whistle it was the hosts who were in the mood for the seasonal fireworks as they triumphed by 30-20.

After the season stalled in deference to the World Cup Final hostilities renewed at Rugby Lane as Sutton welcomed one of her oldest opponents in Sidcup. Despite the tempestuous weather the match was played on a fine surface and mercilessly minus rain as Freddy Bunting kicked off. The opening exchanges saw both teams attempting to run the ball. The Kent side’s first entry to the Sutton 22 was undermined when they conceded a penalty. In contrast for S&E a Callum Gibson charge down saw Chris Farrell surge towards glory before the referee brought it back for a penalty to S&E. Captain Bunting kicked to the corner for the attacking line out. Having secured the ball the forwards escorted George London over the line to score the first try. Freddy Bunting added the extras for a morale-boosting 7-0 lead after 10 minutes.

Following some excellent defence the Black & Whites looked like giving Sidcup a second dose of medicine as they kicked a penalty into the corner. However, the throw in went askew and the visitors were awarded a relieving scrummage. Ten minutes later the men from Kent showed S&E how to score from an attacking line out but not in the classical mode. Having secured the ball Mr Tobias Whinney halted proceedings with a shrill blast of his whistle. He had taken objection to winger Max Russell’s involvement and issued a yellow card and then jogged under the posts to give the Crescent Farm side a penalty try. This was the fourth time this season that the hosts had suffered this draconian sanction as the visitors levelled the score at 7-7.

Reduced to 14 Sutton & Epsom introduced Messrs Boaden & Hegarty for Gibson & London in the hope of holding out. Sidcup were then inconvenienced by the loss of scrum half Sam Leamon to injury. Then his half-back partner, Josh Twyford, made a telling contribution with a steepling kick. The ball descending from the heavens and S&E winger Robbie Martey jumped to contest for the ball on halfway but the ricochet was re-gathered by Sidcup. A second try was only prevented by scrambling defence and an excellent Martey tackle. Sadly for Sutton it was the most temporary stays of execution as the visitors swiftly recycled the ball and forced their way over the whitewash. Josh Twyford added the conversion for a 14-7 lead.

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The first period had been an even affair but was ending with Sidcup in the ascendancy.The visitors next sortie into the host's 22 saw Sutton fullback Ciaran Mohr injure his shoulder to be replaced by the experienced Steve Munford who went to 9 as the incumbent Chris Ballard retreated to the open pastures of 15. The Black & Whites appeared to be navigating the half into a safe haven when they conceded a penalty whilst in possession. Josh Twyford stepped up to conclude the first half with a sweetly struck penalty to extend the visitor's advantage to 17-7.

Despite the lowly league status of the two teams it had been an entertaining first period with both sides carrying the ball with intent but being thwarted by efficient defences who tackled with a relish that reflected the significance of the fixture.

The match re-started and soon Josh Twyford was initiating an aerial bombardment that had proved beneficial in the billowing wind of the first half. This time Sidcup did not gain points from the sensible tactic. Both teams were aware of the significance of the first score in the half. Sutton's efforts were undermined as their line out temporarily malfunctioned and offered the visitors an easy escape. After ten minutes S&E scored through their most familiar method. The half-moon countenance of the Sidcup offender gave no hint of what he had been doing or, indeed,thinking but it was enough for Mr Tobias Whinney to award a penalty. Freddy Bunting collected three points for the Sutton cause as the scoreboard recorded 10-17. Within five minutes an excellent interception by the Black & Whites' lock Ewan McTaggart saw the hosts on the attack and awarded another penalty. Freddy Bunting reduced the deficit to 13-17.

The penalty pendulum swung back in the favour of the Kent men when a few minutes later the referee awarded them an opportunity to go for goal. Josh Twyford stepped up to the mark to make it 20-13 in Sidcup's favour as the game entered the final quarter. With a sense of symmetry the visitors were reduced to 14 men for a high tackle on Max Russell who had earlier enjoyed an unexpected ten minute rest. Soon after the Black & Whites had another penalty well within Freddy Bunting's range but the captain opted to kick to the corner. The gamble resulted in an unexpected bonus. The catch and drive was halted illegally and Sidcup were reduced to 13 men as Sir took his yellow card from his pocket once more. S&E opted for the 5-metre scrum but heroic defence on the line by the visitors saw them hold up the pack to be awarded the drop out from their line.

Before the crowd had time to digest if that might have been the turning point of the match the Surrey men were back on the attack. Chris Farrell found space out wide and burst into the 22and his perfectly timed pass was taken by flanker Rob Hegarty who squeezed in at the corner. A fabulous touchline conversion brought the scores level at 20-20 and the crowd to their feet. With Sidcup still not returned to their full compliment Sutton ran back the restart.

In such circumstances retaining possession is vital. S&E swung the ball from side to side and eventually Sidcup ran out of numbers. Once more it was the ubiquitous Farrell, on the left wing rather than the right this time,who was the provider as he passed to Robbie Martey on halfway. The winger showed all of his vast experience and class as he weaved his way to the line leaving would be tacklers rooted to the spot like potted plants. Freddy Bunting added the conversion as the two goals within five minutes had the Black & Whites leading 27-20.

The reinvigorated hosts went searching for a fourth try and a bonus point. Max Russell broke into the 22 but conceded a penalty on the deck. As the game entered time added on Sutton were awarded a penalty near halfway. Captain Bunting wisely took aim for goal with the reward of extending the advantage to beyond one score. He made it six successful strikes out of six and S&E led 30-20. Spirited Sidcup gathered themselves for a final assault and took advantage of the host's indiscipline to kick a penalty into the 22. Any anxiety for the Rugby Lane supporters was alleviated as their side turned over the ball and won a penalty. Shortly afterwards the referee concluded proceedings and the Black & Whites had a vital 30-20 win.

The hard fought contest was eventually decided by Sutton exploiting their numerical advantage when they played probably their best rugby of the season. In a fine effort by all concerned the hosts defence was much improved. The visitors contributed much to the match and gave no indication of being any worse than previous visitors this season despite their position in the league. Sutton & Epsom travel to the Richard Evans Memorial Playing Fields next Saturday 11th November to take on London Cornish. Please note that the game will kick off at 2:15 pm and for those spectators who enjoy indulging in the post-match reflections these will take place at Roehampton Cricket Club.

Sutton & Epsom:

Ciaran Mohr, Robbie Martey, Lawrence Elliott, Freddy Bunting ©, Max Russell, Gareth O'Brien,Chris Ballard, Callum Gibson, Chris Farrell, Alex Mount, Ewan McTaggart, Josh Glanville, GeorgeLondon, Josh Pulvirenti & Matt Whitaker.

Replacements: Tom Boaden, Rob Hegarty & Steve Munford.

Sidcup:

Charlie Pooley, Luke Sheridan, Dan Masters , Zak Jones, Louis Keeley, Josh Twyford, Sam Leamon,Joe Brady, Harry Large, Teddy Gibbons, Jack Dutton ©, Steve Ecans, Tom Epps, Liam Healey &Jon West.

Replacements: Jon Fordham, Harry Gibbons & George Bird.

Sutton & Epsom go under at Gravesend

11 December 2023

Gravesend v Sutton and Epsom RFC. Saturday 21st October. The last occasion that Sutton & Epsom ventured to the Rectory Field was during Gravesend's triumphant title-winning season of 2013-4 as the host's mighty pack and Italian international half-backs secured a 41-3 victory. Much has changed in the last 10 years and George London was the sole Sutton survivor from that torrid afternoon. Gravesend have recovered from their harrowing opening day of this campaign against the Ironsides and came into the contest with a couple of wins including an impressive success at Medway who had defeated S&E the previous round. After a match of fluctuating fortunes the home team secured a bonus point win by 36-29.

To the relief of all concerned Saturday's torrential rain coincided with S&E's coach journeys to and from Kent. On a mild afternoon, the sun shone but there was a stiff breeze that favoured Sutton when captain Freddy Bunting kicked off the fixture. Keen followers of the Surrey men often feel that a strong drink is a prerequisite to watching the first quarter but on Saturday they made a wonderful start. Australian debutant Josh Pulvirenti soared into the air to secure the first lineout on the opposition 22 and the ball was spun wide for Luca Shaw to be denied in the corner by the touch judge's flag. Consolation for the visitors was immediate as the referee bought the game back for a penalty. It was kicked to the corner, the lineout was secured and a few carries later the Sutton pack was over the line and Matt Whitaker had the try. Freddy Bunting chipped over the simple conversion for a 7-0 lead after 5 minutes. A couple of minutes later the first of many penalties for high tackles provided Freddy Bunting with the opportunity to increase the lead. Making light of the distance and angle he extended the lead to 10-0.

The home XV soon were pressing for points with a lineout in the visitor's 22 but a technical infringement gave Sutton a scrum near their line. Perhaps expecting a long clearing kick on the wind the Kent men were taken by surprise as Number 8 Whitaker took off down the blindside swatting away tacklers with disdain on a 60 metre rampage. Sadly for players and spectators alike the potential entertainment was disrupted by the frequency of the whistle with Gravesend incurring the early wrath of Sir before he transferred his attentions to S&E's infringements.

Freddy Bunting added impressive penalties from distance in the 17th and 22nd minutes and Sutton led by 16-0. The Rectory Field supporters finally had something to cheer when fullback Ben Kite, grandson of club legend John Moxham, burst into the 22 to create a try for centre Chris Brady. The touchline conversion failed but Gravesend were on the board trailing by 5-16. The penalty pendulum now swung violently against the visitors. Soon the referee was beckoning over the Sutton skipper for a word and some cautionary advice. Everyone knew that the next offence would result in a yellow card. True to his word he brandished a yellow card to Josh Glanville on Gravesend's next sortie into the Sutton 22. The ball was kicked into the corner and the hosts had the 5-metre lineout and the opportunity to exploit their strong suit against the numerically reduced opponents. The catch and drive was illegally impeded and a penalty try was awarded. To rub salt into the visitor's wounds a second yellow was flourished and another Josh departed, this time the Antipodean version, Mr Pulvirenti.

The lead was reduced to four points and S&E to 13 men as Gravesend were 12-16 down but with everything in their favour. Sutton & Epsom dug deep and defended with great determination to make it to the interval with no further points conceded and no more men sent to the dug out. The hosts were in the ascendancy despite trailing 16-12 at the break. However, Sutton would only have a couple of minutes of the second half to survive before being returned to their

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full compliment.

The game resumed with the Rectory Field men eager to take advantage of their numbers and not only reduce the deficit but also take the lead for the first time in the match. Remarkably not a single point was gained against the 13 men. Perhaps Gravesend thought it unsporting to score against a Sutton side in reduced circumstances because no sooner were Sutton back to 15 the Kent side took the lead. Kicking a penalty into the corner their efficient catch and drive produced the points as flanker Samraj Chahal was ushered over the line. The conversion faltered but the home team had clawed back a 16-point gap and now led 17-16. The crowd barely had time to savour this success as Sutton's riposte was immediate. Excellent play got S&E into the 22 and Gravesend on the defensive. A long pass found winger Lawrence Elliott in splendid isolation and on the 503 rd anniversary of Ferdinand Magellan's discovery of his eponymous Straits he had a considerably simpler journey to the try-line to score. Freddy Bunting converted with aplomb as Sutton regained the advantage to lead 23-17.

To mimic the visitors the hosts instantly replied with a try of their own in the corner. The ball was spun wide and a powerful burst by winger Andrew Cooke saw him touch down in the corner. Rhys Betts could not replicate Sutton's touchline conversion and Gravesend trailed by a solitary point, 22-23. The second period had seen three tries in seven minutes and the expectant crowd were hungry for more. S&E were next to score and it was from that most familiar source…the boot of Bunting. The captain's fourth penalty of the afternoon increased the Rugby Lane team's advantage to 26-22. The Kent men surged into the 22 after an excellent probing kick had Sutton scrambling near their line. From the Gravesend 5-metre scrum replacement Junior Rocket went close to scoring but a few phases later and Samraj Chahal picked up his second try of the afternoon. Rhys Betts ended his kicking drought bisecting the uprights to regain the lead by 29-26.

Entering the final 10 minutes the game was very much in the balance. Junior Rocket's explosive entry into the game now turned into a damp squib as he was not only penalised for his covering tackle but also given a yellow card due to its height. Numerical disadvantage once again proved to be no obstacle for the team suffering the man in the bin. As Sutton pressed hard for the next score and to keep the ball alive they rather naively got bundled into touch. A grateful Gravesend had a lineout near halfway and fell back on their tried and tested routine of the catch and drive. They advanced down the paddock and won a penalty. They knocked the ball into the corner with the prospect of another try. For the second time the referee ruled that foul play had prevented a certain try from the lineout and awarded the penalty try, Chris Farrell departed with a yellow card, the teams were 14 each as the Rectory Field XV could reflect on the 36-26 advantage in time added on. For the visitors it looked as if they would be returning to Surrey with nothing to show for their efforts. However, a penalty at the restart enabled Freddy Bunting to increase his personal tally to 19 points and reduce the deficit to a single score thus earning a valuable bonus point. A minute later the match concluded with Gravesend victorious by the score of 36-29.

Any side that outscores the opposition by 6-2 in tries deserves to win any game and Gravesend's clinical efficiency in the attacking lineouts made all the difference. Sutton & Epsom were much improved from last week. The tackling, the lineout and the fluid passing in the backs were better than at any time in the season. Josh Pulvirenti had a fine debut as looks to be a valuable acquisition. Even by his remarkably high standards, Freddy Bunting's kicking was quite exceptional as he landed 5 penalties and 2 conversions from his magnificent seven kicks at goal. Both XVs suffered with discipline and endured a hefty penalty count in an evenly matched and entertaining contest. Ultimately it was the hosts with their formidable catch & drive that held the trump card in this match and they exploited it to the full.

Next Saturday there are no league fixtures in deference to the Rugby World Cup final. The campaign continues on 4th November at Rugby Lane when Sidcup are the visitors. The Kent side recorded their first win of the season on Saturday by defeating London Cornish by 28-21 at Crescent Farm. It will be a basement battle as these two clubs with proud histories sit at the bottom of the league table. The kick off is at the earlier time of 2:30pm.

Sutton & Epsom:
Ciaran Mohr, Luca Shaw, Ross Parsons, Freddy Bunting ©, Lawrence Elliott, Gareth O'Brien, Chris Ballard, Callum Gibson, Chris Farrell, Alex Mount, Ewan McTaggart, Josh Glanville, George London, Josh Pulvirenti & Matt Whitaker.
Replacements: Tom Boaden, Rob Hegarty & Steve Munford.

Gravesend:
Ben Kite, Harry Tasker, Chris Brady, Jamie Fautley, Andrew Cooke, Rhys Betts, Matt Brady, Brendan Kelly, Terry Papworth, Harry Brooker, Tom Bird, Andrew Hampshire, Matt Hewitt, Samrat Chahal & Connor Murphy.
Replacements: Jamie Forsyth, Stan Dadson & Junior Rocket.

Medway Overpower Sorry Sutton & Epsom

11 December 2023

Sutton & Epsom RFC 15 Medway 33. Saturday 14th October.

Last Saturday the league had a rest weekend after five fixtures in September. Buoyed by their stunning success over league leaders Battersea Ironsides, Sutton, at the last time of asking, had travelled to Old Alleynians with great expectations but fell upon hard times. The latest instalment had S and E in search of a morale-boosting victory as they entertained Medway who were looking for their third win on the bounce to continue their climb up the table. Rugby Lane has born witness to much drama already this season.

The agony of a one-point loss to Beckenham was followed by the ecstasy of a win over Battersea Ironsides by the same margin at the last time of asking with Freddy Bunting's boot being the determining factor on both occasions. Unfortunately for the home support this fixture was a foregone conclusion long before referee Simon Matthews ended the contest with Medway earning a 33-15 bonus point win.

Freddy Bunting kicked off the match under threatening skies with a strong breeze in his face. The Black and Whites have undermined their campaign so far by conceding far too many first quarter tries.

Saturday was to be another dose of unpalatable medicine for S and E players and onlookers alike. These things come in threes sprung to mind as Sutton conceded a free kick and two penalties to gift the visitors a 5-metre lineout. A perfectly executed move saw the ball popped to flanker Jonah Hyde who strolled over. Jack Johnson added the extras for a 7-0 Medway lead after five minutes. If that was dispiriting discipline the next score was lamentably lackadaisical. The visitors kicked a ball speculatively down the middle of the pitch, a harsh critic might have said they had just gifted the hosts possession with that most fashionable of plays. A combination of wind and cruel bounce turned it into a perfect assist for scrum half Ben Dance to gather and run in a second score. Elements apart, it was very poor play by Sutton and Epsom and they paid the severest penalty. Jack Johnson added another telling blow with the simple conversion as the home team trailed 14-0 in under 10 minutes.

Unsurprisingly the Kent side were overflowing with confidence and looked to take advantage of this perfect start where they had had to do so little to be comfortably ahead. They started to play with power and authority. The midfield centre combination of captain Antony Clement and John Sipawa were a constant menace throughout. It was not only their bullocking runs but also the timely offloads to support that impressed as the Surrey men were overrun in the first quarter. Ben Dance got to within 5 metres but his pass failed to find his colleague. Another attack closed in on the Sutton line ended with the ball being passed onto the forehead of an unsuspecting Medway man 5 metres out. Desperate and spirited Sutton defence created timely turnovers as the seemingly inevitable score was averted.

On the half hour drizzle descended, a rainbow embraced the ground and the Sutton slumber ended in dramatic fashion. Jordan Huie, playing his first game of the

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season, received the ball near halfway. Initially he did well to avoid being bundled into touch and then showing great strength in contact he wriggled free of his pursuers and passed to fullback Ciaran Mohr.

The fifteen with a clear field ahead of him made the 30 metres but was grateful it was not 31. Freddy Bunting's kick against the wind from the touchline was just buffeted wide but S and E were on the scoreboard trailing 5-14. Buoyed by this success the hosts monopolised possession for the remainder of the first period. The forwards carried with good effect and the ball was spun wide but the visitors were as abrasive in defence as in attack. Freddy Bunting added a penalty to make it 14-8 but then the Black and Whites suffered a double blow. Prop Callum Gibson received a yellow for a tip tackle from the lowest of altitudes and Number 8 Kean Orchard left the field injured. The half concluded with no further incidents with the Rochester-based men 14-8 to the good.

Considering the start of the first period Sutton enduring the opening exchanges of the second half with 14 men was a worrying prospect. On the other side of the balance sheet Medway must have been concerned that what had started out as a procession to victory was now a serious contest with S and E within a score. The visitors pressed hard to make good their numerical superiority but dogged defence by the hosts denied them. A 5-metre Medway lineout saw no repeat of the opening score but Sutton's relief was short-lived as they failed to clear effectively. The Priestfields outfit pressed hard and scored in the corner following sustained pressure as influential Number 8 Deji Oyesola forced his way over the whitewash.

Though the conversion from the flank failed the Kent team had extended their lead to 19-8 with a touch under half an hour left on the clock. A quick retort from the Black and Whites was imperative but the next score came the way of the visitors and secured them a bonus point. The centre combo of Clement and Sipawa were only just denied but the ball was recycled and open side Jonah Hyde touched down for his second try of the afternoon. Jack Johnson landed another punch on the teetering body of Sutton with the extras to lead 26-8 as the game entered the final quarter. S and E, as per the first period, came to life and flooded into the Medway 22 and Ross Parsons' pass to the waiting Ewan McTaggart was knocked on by the defence and the hosts had a 5-metre scrum. 18 points adrift on the scoreboard it was a must score moment for the Rugby Lane team. The visiting pack disrupted the scrummage and the briefest of sieges was lifted.

A spirited Sutton valiantly looked for a score running from their own line to halfway at one stage as the clock ran down. The game entered time added on and it was Medway who were next to add to their account. John Sipawa running over two would be tacklers as he maurauded down the touchline to score a try in the corner that his afternoon's performance surely warranted. The heavyweight boot of Jack Johnson bisected the uprights for 33-8. With the game deep into the time referee Matthews had allocated for stoppages S and E went in search of a consolation. With admirably patience and control the forwards crashed against the apparently adamantine defence of the visitors and three penalties followed in rapid succession under the uprights. Finally, the wall of red and amber was breached by prop Callum Gibson who reached over to secure his first try for Sutton. In the blink of an eye Freddy Bunting added the conversion for 33-15. Moments later the referee's shrill blast of his whistle signalled the end of the contest with Medway deservedly taking the glory with an emphatic 33-15 win.

Medway were the superior side on the day as every aspect of their game functioned admirably. Combative in contact and adventurous in intent they scored five tries. Their support play was of the highest quality as Messrs Clement and Sipawa made telling inroads and offloaded with great effect. For S and E Rob Hegarty had his finest game as he carried the battle to the opposition but brief Sutton spells of quality were insufficient on the day. To pile Pelion on Ossa prop Will Lloyd suffered, probably, a career-ending injury when he ruptured his distal bicep tendon after 50 minutes. Everyone at Rugby Lane wishes him well.

As England are making their final preparations for their World Cup semi-final against South Africa in the Stade de France Sutton and Epsom will be doing battle on the Rectory Field with Gravesend. The Kent club had an initiation of fire this season with a humbling 80-7 defeat to Battersea Ironsides on the opening Saturday. Since then they have rallied with wins over Sidcup and Medway and they will provide a stern test for the Black and Whites.

Sutton and Epsom:
Ciaran Mohr, Luca Shaw, Lawrence Elliott, Freddy Bunting ©, Jordan Huie, Gareth O'Brien, Ross Parsons, Will Lloyd, Jack Howes, Callum Gibson, Ewan McTaggart, Josh Glanville, George London, Rob Hegarty and Kean Orchard.
Replacements: Alex Mount, Ben Tame and Jack Briggs.

Medway:
Sean Marriott, Conor Chalmers, John Sipawa, Antony Clement ©, Bobby Ellis, Jack Johnson, Ben Dance, Ryan Eastley, Josh Knight, Todd Johnson, Kyle Woollard, Dan Jackson, Tom Beaumont, Jonah Hyde and Deji Oyesola.
Replacements: Zeki Yesilmen, Josh Mason and Sam Sharpe.

Sutton and Epsom's Alley of dreams dashed in the end.

11 December 2023

Old Alleynians 29 Sutton & Epsom RFC 25. Saturday 30th September.

For Sutton and Epsom supporters with good memories, and multiple miles on the clock, they will recall opening three consecutive league campaigns from 1989-90 onwards against Old Alleynians. However, 3rd November 2012, in S&E's league winning season, was the last time that the two teams met at Dulwich Common with the hosts shading it 18-17. For Saturday's clash the Black & Whites welcomed back wingers Kyren Ghumra and Robbie Martey which meant that the Rugby Lane team no longer resembled Alf Ramsey's World Cup winners. It was another thrilling chapter in the story of this season with Old Alleynians triumphing 29-25.

Freddy Bunting kicked off in front of a miniscule crowd, no doubt affected by the rail strike, making the very busy roads in the environs even more congested. Thankfully the numbers grew throughout the afternoon and they were rewarded with an exhilarating game. A perfectly flighted kick descended just outside the host's 22 and was followed by a resolute Jack Benton tackle. OAs went wide but conceded a penalty. Freddy Bunting accepted the opportunity to give his team the early 3-0 lead.

The host's reply was instantaneous. The first of many sumptuous offloads by the Alleynians had them invading the visitor's 22 and a kick ahead gave them an attacking lineout. With clinical efficiency hooker Rory Simpson forced his way over for the first try of the game. Henry Dewing's touchline conversion went awry but OAs were 5-3 up.

Sutton & Epsom were equally rapid in their riposte. Declining a penalty shot at goal they went in search of the premium points with a kick to the corner with the attacking lineout to follow. Matt Whitaker secured the throw and the S&E pack was initially halted but a second surge carried Josh Glanville over the line for a very similar score to their opponents. Captain Bunting made light of the kick from the flank to restore Sutton's lead to 10-5. Old Alleynians pressed hard for the next score. Their swarming defence and high tempo game pressured the Rugby Lane team into errors. The visitors survived a charged down in their 22 but later a mistimed lineout created a turnover with fatal consequences. The home team ruthlessly exploited an overlap for Will Malins to score the first of his trio of tries. Henry Dewing bisected the uprights to put the Dulwich-based club into a 12-10 lead. As the first quarter ended OAs, tighthead prop Tom Weightman offered sagely advice to his teammates at the restart: "Boys they cannot exit let's play territory".

Within five minutes it looked as if OAs were about to extend their lead from a 5-metre lineout. Defiant defence stopped the advancing forwards and when it went wide a desperate grasp from Michael Bennion prevented the backs applying the coup de grâce. From the ensuing scrum a stunning break from Matt Whitaker supported by Kyren Ghumra took play into the host's half. A penalty for a high tackle was advanced to the 22. Superb play saw Kyren Ghumra to 5 metres out but Jack Howes in support could not hold on to the pass with the undefended line awaiting him. The error was not costly as the Black & White pack won a penalty at the scrum. Opting for tap penalty from 5 metres George London got to within a metre before transferring the ball to Chris Farrell to score. The conversion hit the post but Sutton led 15-12.

Old Alleynians then dominated the remainder of the first period with two tries in the last ten minutes. The first score was Will Malins' second as he got the ball in space and finished with pace and power in the corner. Though the conversion failed the lead had changed hands once more with OAs 17-15 to the good. With

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the wind in their sails the southeast Londoners were soon pressing for another score. Desperate defence held up the hosts over the line. The goal-line drop out was taken by the hosts who laid siege to the Sutton line. A diving Ghumra interception denied a try but soon after Will Malins turned provider with a wonderful offload to create a try for Number 8 Tom Grahamslaw. Henry Dewing concluded the first period with his second conversion of the afternoon for a 24-15 lead. The teams turned around with a bonus point already secure in Old Alleynians' back pocket for the four fabulous first half tries.

The contest resumed, the tempo increased and the chances to score multiplied exponentially. Quite remarkably there followed thirty minutes of end-to-end rugby with numerous chances but no additional scores. As one matchday photographer mused both XVs were specialising in try avoidance. The catalogue of close calls began with that man Malins once more to the fore. The Sutton defence dawdled by the touchline and the winger manufactured a kick ahead and from nothing the ball was rolling over the try-line with a couple of Alleynians vying for the glory. However, they were denied by the diving Sutton lock Josh Glanville, who used every inch of his frame, to rescue S&E. A few minutes later Kyren Ghumra was sprinting clear in the wide open spaces with a try beckoning before his errant pass sailed high into touch. Then OAs pounced on a ball dropped by the visitors and a breakaway score looked a certainty. But a backpedalling Bunting and Bennion prevented the dramatic score.

Sutton's cause was not aided when Matt Whitaker departed for a yellow card as a result of cumulative offences. Old Alleynians kicked into the corner hoping to immediately take advantage of their numerical superiority. The ball was claimed and spun wide but white-line fever overwhelmed fullback Henry Dewing and Rob Hegarty scythed him down a metre short with expectant support on the outside. Sutton then took over the 'nearly but not quite' mantle. Reminiscent of the denouement of the Battersea game the previous round they hammered against the line under the posts. Herculean heroics by the SE21 outfit forced S&E to seek the alternative route via the backs. They were denied by a marvellous cover tackle on Kyren Ghumra in the corner. After all the thrills and spills the next score was the much more mundane Bunting penalty to reduce the Old Alleynians' lead to 24-18.

Hardly had the crowd had time to digest that Sutton and Epsom were within a score before they rose to applaud Will Malins' hat trick. It was another excellent finish and a deserved reward for an outstanding performance on the wing. Though the conversion missed with the lead 29-18 with only a couple of minutes remaining of normal time it appeared to be the match-winning moment. However, the Black & Whites were not done and we were able to bear witness to another episode of their long-running Soap "Life On The Opposition Line". The Alleynian defence had been robust all game and were eager for another titanic tussle under their posts. After very careful consideration following numerous carries the referee awarded S&E a try. Chris Farrell emerged from the pile of bodies to claim his second of the afternoon.

Freddy Bunting's simple conversion meant Sutton trailed 25-29 creating a chaotic conclusion. Both sides decided to run the ball at every opportunity. Henry Dewing thought he had finally shut the door on the impertinent opponents when he chipped ahead but the bounce did not favour him and the game was still in the balance.

Though Sutton and Epsom threw the ball from one side to the other they could make little headway against the voracious tackling of the Alleynians. With time up OAs gratefully kicked the ball from the paddock at their first opportunity to collect a thoroughly deserved bonus point win. The Malins hat trick was the obvious highlight but the Old Alleynian XV were excellent with lock Ben Osuntokun epitomising their performance. The Number 4 secured lineout possession, carried to great effect in the loose and was prominent in defence. For S&E they probably created more chances than in any other game this season but could not find that cutting edge. Kyren Ghumra was a tad ring rusty in his first outing of the season but was still a prominent threat. The hosts were good value for their win as they managed to play at a faster tempo, were aggressive in defence and kept attacks going with dextrous offloads and excellent support running.

The league has a weekend off before resuming on Saturday 14th October when Medway visit Rugby Lane to resume hostilities in this most competitive of leagues.

Sutton & Epsom: Michael Bennion, Kyren Ghumra, Ciaran Mohr, Freddy Bunting ©, Robbie Martey, Gareth O'Brien, Chris Ballard, Will Lloyd, Jack Howes, Callum Gibson, Jack Benton, Josh Glanville, George London, Rob Hegarty & Matt Whitaker.

Replacements: (all used) Tariq Al Khaldi, Chris Farrell & Ross Parsons.

Old Alleynians Henry Dewing, Will Malins, Will Foster, Robert Outram, Tom Vogel, Andrew Jones-Davies, Tristam Holden, Richard Garrett, Rory Simpson, Tom Weightman, Ben Osuntokun, Will Hinchcliffe, Chris Thatcher, Tyreece Asamoah, Tom Grahamslaw.

Replacements: (all used) Charles Thompson, James Mair & Tom Williams.

Image: Old Alleyian forward in another match C. Old Alleyian RFC website

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Bunting Boots Battersea Into Touch

11 December 2023

Sutton & Epsom 26 Battersea Ironsides 25, Saturday 23rd September. This was the first time the two clubs had ever met in a league fixture as Battersea Ironsides became league opponent number 104 at Rugby Lane on Saturday. Once more the Black & Whites were set against an unbeaten side and on this occasion they entertained the league leaders. The hosts gave a debut to fullback Luca Shaw whilst the visitors, not for the first time this campaign, made a host of changes to the squad who had downed London Cornish the previous Saturday. S&E turned the early season form guide on its head with a dramatic 26-25 victory.

After the recent torrid temperatures it was a welcome return to sensible weather that was most conducive to entertaining rugby. Freddy Bunting set the game in motion and within five minutes the Ironsides had taken the lead. A solid lineout in the 22 was followed by a penetrative carry by lock Jack Wharton before captain Stuart released the backs and winger Ben Turner applied the coup de grâce. The conversion from the flank drifted wide as Battersea led 5-0. Five minutes later and the visitors had doubled their lead. A stunning break from a ruck on halfway by blindside Raphael Arboine was snuffed out by a splendid cover tackle deep in the S&E 22 but the damage had been done. The ball was recycled and spun wide for Ben Turner to dot down once more. Another challenging conversion from Charles Stuart failed as Battersea Ironsides were 10-0 ahead in as many minutes.

The league leaders were content that the natural order was being maintained as they appeared to be on their way to a regulation bonus point victory condemning the Black & Whites to another demoralising defeat. However, perhaps there should be a pitch-side sign at Rugby Lane declaring: "BEWARE OF THE BUNTING". An illegal side entry to a ruck offered the Sutton skipper his first shot at goal. He duly obliged to put S&E on the board at 3-10. A few minutes later he was caressing the ball through the uprights again for 6-10 to conclude the first quarter. The second penalty being awarded for a deliberate knock on after a fine break by Matt Whitaker. The men from Burntwood Lane responded as outside centre Jacob Charles carved through the home defences and with a modicum more of precision a try would have ensued. Moments later his centre partner Ben Lyons held on to the ball too long and another chance disappeared over the horizon.

The SW17 outfit's progress was already being hampered by the regular blasts from referee Richardson's whistle. The sight of the referee shooing back the Battersea offenders the obligatory ten metres as if they were recalcitrant hens was becoming a regular feature of the game. Almost inevitably Freddy Bunting was given another opportunity to add to his account but failed to reduce the deficit on the half hour. The hosts rang the changes with Will Lloyd replacing Callum Gibson in the front row and Jack Benton taking over from Ewan McTaggart in the second row. The remainder of the half saw more probing kicking from both XVs as if they had signed a non-aggression pact putting security ahead of ambition. In time added on, normal service was resumed as Freddy Bunting bisected the uprights for the third time as S&E trailed 9-10. There was just enough time on the clock for the visitors to also have a shot at goal. Charles Stuart kept his head and landed his penalty from near the halfway line to conclude the first period with Battersea
Ironsides 13-9 to the good.

As the sides turned around a fascinating contest was evenly poised. The early dominance of the visitors had been undermined by indiscipline as they threw around

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penalties like confetti and failed to heed the impassioned plea of ‘cut out the penalties’ from within their ranks. S&E grew into the game via a solid scrum and keeping it tight with the forwards carrying to good effect to counteract the threat of the Battersea backs in open play.

The Black & Whites started the second half in fine style. An early infringement saw Freddy Bunting kick to the 22. An excellent catch and drive was followed by Matt Whitaker carrying to within five metres of the line forcing a scrum to Sutton under the posts. The resilient Battersea defence held the line until Sutton were awarded a penalty try when prop Will Lloyd was illegally prevented from collecting his annual score. The hosts now led by 16-13. In adversity the Ironsides made the perfect riposte. Probing kicks from Charles Stuart pegged the hosts in their 22 and put the visitors onto the front foot. Then more incisive running by Charles Jacobs had S&E on the retreat as centre partner Ben Lyons was on hand to shrug off challengers for an excellent finish in the corner. Despite the conversion failing Charles Stuart’s side had seen the restoration of their lead as the scoreboard read 18-16 to Battersea Ironsides.

With an unpleasant echo of last Saturday’s match against Old Reigatian the opposition tries were like London buses and Battersea secured a bonus point for their fourth try a minute later. Capitalising on the bouncing ball from an up and under the Openview side tore into the Sutton 22 and scrum half Jack Moates dived over. Charles Stuart gratefully accepted the easier conversion to extend the lead to 25-16. In a blink of an eye the Rugby Lane crowd, who had been contemplating a first win of the season, were now dreading a fourth defeat on the spin. As the game entered the final quarter so the action switched to the visitors’ 22. Despite pressure and territory the hosts had to be content with another Freddy Bunting penalty to be within a score at 19-25.

With only seven minutes remaining the men in green ventured into Black & White territory and were given a penalty. Following the prevailing orthodoxy the pot at goal was declined in favour of the kick towards the corner. In hindsight, Charles Stuart’s decision might have been a tad cavalier as a successful kick would have translated to a nine-point lead. Fortune did not favour the bold as they were undone by conceding their umpteenth penalty. In time added on a collapsed scrum gave Freddy Bunting the chance to kick to the corner for S&E to have a shot at glory. There followed 5 minutes of unrelenting assault on the Battersea line, heroic defence and unbearable tension with penalties and scrums as the action concentrated under the posts. Finally, a mass of bodies slumped over the line and jubilant Sutton players thrust their arms skyward. Mr Richardson took a considered look and finally raised his arm aloft for Rob Hegarty’s try. It was left to Freddy Bunting to add the conversion that was greeted with rapturous applause and the final whistle as Sutton won 26-25.

Battersea Ironsides had the ideal start with a quick-fire Ben Turner brace of tries. Their lineout, whether on their ball or against the Sutton throw, was excellent. Centre Charles Jacobs was a threat every time he had the ball. Captain Charles Stuart varied the attack from 10 but ultimately they were let down by their discipline. The profligate penalty count spread like a contagion and not only cost them 12 points, but also hefty yardage and time spent with 14 men.

The Black & Whites showed character in bucketfuls coming back from the dire start and then overturning the 9-point deficit that culminated with the nail-biting denouement. For Sutton the pack was a source of great strength in the set-piece and the loose, Matt Whitaker was a giant in attack and defence whilst Freddy Bunting kept the scoreboard ticking over.

Next Saturday the Black & Whites visit newly promoted Old Alleynians for the first time since November 2012. The OAs have had a solid start to the campaign lying sixth in the table after wins over Gravesend and Sidcup.

Sutton & Epsom:
Luca Shaw, Jack Briggs, Ciaran Mohr, Freddy Bunting ©, Max Russell, Gareth O’Brien, Chris Ballard, Tom Boaden, Jack Howes, Callum Gibson, Ewan McTaggart, Josh Glanville, George London, Rob Hegarty & Matt Whitaker. Replacements: (all used) Will Lloyd, Chris Farrell & Jack Benton.

Battersea Ironsides:
Jack Winch, Ben Turner, Charles Jacobs, Ben Lyons, Charlie Craig, Charles Stuart, Jack Moates, Sam
Chetwynd, Harry Vigar, Harry Batstone, Jack Wharton, Max Trickett, Raph Arboine, Alex Chitan, Charlie Horrell. Replacements: (all used) Jonny Newsham, George Williams & Billy Diamond.

Close result in match of fluctuating fortunes

11 December 2023

The Black and White bandwagon descended Saturday 16th upon the Geoffrey Knight Fields for the third round of the Regional 2 South East season. Old Reigatian (OR) are one of three clubs, along with London Cornish and Old Alleynians, who crossed Sutton and Epsom’s path during their brief dalliance with Level 7 in 2012-13. For Rugby Lane supporters of a certain vintage there was a link to the club’s former glory. The OR captain was Reilly Franklin-Talbot the son of erstwhile Sutton Number 8 Sean who, amongst many Herculean deeds, scored the last gasp try in the 1990 Surrey Cup final to defeat Old Mid-Whitgiftians by 16-11. Now returning to the present from some rose-tinted nostalgia, the hosts had begun the year with impressive wins over Sidcup and London Cornish in sharp contrast to the suburbanites’ start. The early form guide was just maintained as OR edged past the visitors 35-29 in a game of fluctuating fortunes.

On another glorious summer afternoon, that had a refreshing breeze that was more sympathetic to the travails of the participants than last weekend’s cauldron, the crowd gathered to revel in an afternoon made for running rugby. Freddy Bunting’s lofted kick off was superbly tapped back by Michael Davies to initiate an opening period of Sutton control. Following multiple phases and profitable probing by Sutton and Epsom they were awarded a penalty. Freddy Bunting did the necessary and Sutton led 3-0. The Black and Whites returned to the OR 22 looking to build on their early advantage but in a crowded midfield Reigatian centre Tom Allen made a timely intervention to intercept and race away to score under the posts. The unchallenging offering was accepted by Conor Woods as the home crowd applauded their 7-3 lead after an enthralling eight minutes.

An accidental, but avoidable, offside by Sutton and Epsom gave the Reigate team the opportunity to test the visitors’ defence as they kicked into the 22. The defence stood firm and won a scrummage that enabled them to exit via Chris Ballard’s boot. However, a kick is only as good as its chase. A pitiful challenge encouraged a wonderful counter and in the blink of an eye a try looked to be a certainty until a crucial pass hit the deck with the line at the mercy of OR who compounded their misery by giving away a penalty. Their disappointment was assuaged within scrum they deservedly scored. The backs created the overlap for flanker Finlay Lock to apply the coup de grâce. A sweetly struck conversion by Conor Woods made it 14-3.

The Old Reigatian backs were in full swing and it was a thrilling sight to behold. The combination of pace, evasive footwork and wonderful passing was devastating. In addition, the ubiquitous flanker Finlay Lock linked play with deft touches and was supported ably by captain Reilly Franklin-Talbot’s powerful carrying. Attacking once more this potent potion for success was denied on the line by a Will Lloyd tackle. This was only a temporary stay of execution as OR scored from the 5-metre scrum. Winger Max Coyle stood up the defence and stepped past would be tacklers to finish with aplomb. Conor Woods bisected the uprights and the unstoppable Old Reigatian XV had an impressive and deserved 21-3 lead.

Sutton and Epsom tinkered with their front row as Tom Boaden was replaced by Tariq Al Khaldi. Then five minutes later the Sutton pack was forced into another change when Number 8 Kean Orchard injured his knee and the visitors brought Dan Jones off the bench. The Black and Whites now employed the boot to great effect. Firstly, a Bunting kick forced a drop out then an O’Brien effort set up a lineout in the 22. A jinking run by Gareth O’Brien had the hosts in retreat. The Sutton pack recycled the ball and George London forced his way over. Captain Bunting added the extras to cut the lead to 21-10. The next opportunity to add to the score went to the home team.

However, the Rugby Lane men resolutely defended a 5-metre line and the timely intervention of centre Ross Parsons won the visitors a relieving penalty. At the other end the Black and Whites were awarded a penalty and, in a rare demonstration of fallibility, Freddy Bunting’s kick drifted by on the crosswind. The kicking machine returned to working order when the Sutton skipper slotted over his next opportunity that concluded the first period with Old Reigatian 21-13 to the good.

Within five minutes of the restart Freddy Bunting had reduced the deficit to 5 points with his third penalty of the afternoon. Sutton were playing with control and with astute application of their kicking game. The key to their improving fortunes was the set scrum as Messrs Al Khaldi, Howes and Lloyd were utterly dominant.

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Indeed it was from a scrum that Sutton and Epsom took the lead.

The Black and White pack marched back their opponents by 10 metres in a ruthless demonstration of power and control. Michael Davies took advantage of the back-peddling defence and the visitors were halted on the line. Sutton were not to be denied and hooker Jack Howes was able to reach over to score. Bunting's conversion put Sutton ahead by 23-21. They had overturned the 18-point margin by starving the Reigatian team of possession.

Sutton and Epsom extended their lead when the scrum was awarded a penalty in front of the posts and Freddy Bunting chipped it over to stretch the lead to 26-21. OR awoke from their slumber in startling fashion. From the restart Chris Ballard cleared to the host's half and the ball was gathered by Max Coyle who set off on a scything run that exploited Sutton's poor cover. Scrum half Alex Skinner was on hand to finish off the sweeping move and Conor Woods added the simplest of conversions. Reinvigorated by regaining the lead at 28-26, with a bonus point in the bank, OR's struck again moments later. Skipper Reilly Franklin-Talbot marauded into the 22 and passed to winger Harrison Mitchell who dotted down. Conor Woods made it five conversions from five attempts as Old Reigatian led 35-26 as the game entered the final quarter.

Sutton and Epsom were soon gifted a way back into the game with a penalty in front of the posts. However, Chris Ballard took a quick tap penalty trying to exploit the defensive disarray. The gamble did not go to glory and the Reigate men survived. Soon after a wonderful chance to extend their lead was butchered when centre Tom Allen's passing let him down following his brilliant break that denied the home crowd a third try in a devastating ten minute spell. With the game in time added on Dan Jones was manhandled at the breakdown and Sutton and Epsom had a penalty. This time the points were taken to give the visitors a potential losing bonus point as the lead was reduced to 35-29. A minute later the Rugby Lane supporters were crestfallen when Old Reigatian were awarded a penalty in front of the posts. The previously perfect Conor Woods erred and the score remained the same. Despite frantic efforts from the Black and Whites there was no eleventh hour drama and the game concluded moments later with OR triumphant by 35-29.

Old Reigatian's backs played some thrilling rugby on a perfect day in the wonderful setting of the Geoffrey Knight Fields. In addition, the tireless Finlay Lock excelled on the flank as OR outscored Sutton and Epsom by five goals to two. In a game of contrasting styles the hosts certainly monopolised the highlights package but there are many ways to flay a feline. The Sutton pack with Tariq Al Khaldi making a most significant contribution off the bench made it an intriguing contest.

With 19 points from the bludgeoning Bunting boot the game could have gone either way. For the visitors there were improvements from the previous outing. Ross Parsons in the centres epitomised the improved work at the breakdown. Jack Howes at hooker had a 100% record with his lineout throwing. However, the garlands are reserved for the fabulous front row who created the platform from which all their success came.

Old Reigatian remain unbeaten, second in the table on points difference having garnered the maximum 15 from their three matches. Sutton have now lost to three of the four unbeaten XVs. Next Saturday they host the other unbeaten side, Battersea Ironsides, who top the table.

Sutton and Epsom:

Michael Davies, Jack Briggs, Ross Parsons, Freddy Bunting ©, Max Russell, Gareth O'Brien, Chris Ballard, Tom Boaden, Jack Howes, Will Lloyd, Ewan McTaggart, Josh Glanville, George London, Rob Hegarty and Kean Orchard.

Replacements: Tariq Al Khaldi, Dan Jones and Alfie Baker. XXX

Old Reigatian: Sam Turner, Harrison Mitchell, Gareth Stephens, Tom Allen, Max Coyle, Conor Woods, Alex Skinner, Ciaran Lee, Ciaran Nestor, Toby Collister, Reilly Franklin-Talbot ©, Dan Grant, Seb Courteney-Walker, Finlay Lock and Oli Brooks.

Replacements: Ethan Monk, Sam Lenihan and Max Nichol.

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