

# Beckenham Edge Extraordinary Encounter

11 September 2023



**Sutton and Epsom** 41 - Beckenham 42. It was a case of polar opposites on the opening Saturday for this weekend's combatants as the hosts began the campaign with an away defeat at Reeds whilst the visitors got off the mark with a thrilling 36-31 home win against London Cornish. **Sutton and Epsom** had not had the pleasure of hosting the Kent club since their 28-8 victory in November 2013. The Black and Whites gave debuts to starting prop Callum Gibson whilst utility back Jack Briggs began on the bench. In marked contrast evergreen George London returned to the colours to make his 187<sup>th</sup> appearance. The match surpassed even the weather in terms of being unexpected and eleven tries later Beckenham won by a solitary point as the scoreboard read 42-41.

The Rugby Lane crowd palavered peacefully onwards from the clubhouse into the unclouded jollity of the afternoon to witness the Class of 2023-4 open their domestic account. The thermometer told of testing temperatures in the 90s and the challenging conditions were certain to be a factor in proceedings. Freddy Bunting kicked off for the hosts. The first opportunity was given to the visitors as Sutton strayed offside to give Lewis Bunton a simple penalty to put Beckenham on the scoreboard, 3-0, in the third minute. Sutton and Epsom replied in kind moments later as Freddy Bunting equalised with a penalty of his own for 3-3. The Bunting boot then set up a great opportunity with a fabulous 50 20 kick. An ensuing quickly taken penalty by Chris Ballard had the Black and Whites under the posts. Will Lloyd went close before it went wide for Gareth O'Brien to jink his way over. Freddy Bunting added the simple conversion for a 10-3 lead.

The next sortie to the Kent 22 resulted in a second Sutton goal. Michael Bennion made a break and Max Russell kept it alive before it was switched to the right. Gareth O'Brien then glided in untouched under the posts from 30 metres for his second try. Freddy Bunting did the necessary for 17-3 and the players enjoyed a much needed official hydration break. With thirsts slaked and suitably revitalised the boys from Balmoral Avenue swept into the home 22 and won a penalty five out. They set up the lineout and though their catch and drive faltered they were awarded another penalty. A quick tap and a powerful burst saw Jamaican international Rimarni Richards score. The conversion drifted wide but Beckenham had reduced the deficit to 8-17. The Black and Whites immediately extended their lead, though Michael Bennion's dummy went unsold, the ball was recycled, George London stooped to take a pass on the half-volley then made light of the attentions of the visitors' defence to relentlessly power on and touch down from 20 metres. Freddy Bunting bisected the uprights and Sutton and Epsom had clear water at 24-8 approaching the half hour mark.

That clear water was to be the high water mark for the hosts as their ascendancy was alarmingly transformed by a stunning Kent comeback. It was not so much a turning of the tide but a tectonic shift of seismic proportions. A careless penalty at the restart gifted Beckenham an opportunity from a 5-metre lineout. They executed their process to perfection as former skipper Liam Markey flopped over. Despite the conversion failing they were on their way back at 13-24. It was the visitors' turn to err at the restart, not only kicking out on the full but also following up by giving away a penalty. Sutton and Epsom opted for the kick to the corner rather than through the uprights but the gamble did not pay dividends. Moments later at the other end the men from Balmoral Avenue were more clinical as they won their lineout and a bullocking run by Rimarni Richards crossed the whitewash. On this occasion Lewis Bunton added the extras for 20-24. As a disbelieving home crowd dropped their remarks into the understanding air there was one more twist, or perhaps dagger to the heart, before the half-time whistle. Dan Hamilton gathered a loose ball in his own half and he sprinted by the grandstand with no one ahead of him. Desperate cover closed him down but a wonderful support run by Lewis Bunton saw the 10 score. He added the conversion and the visitors turned around 27-24 to the good to end a jaw-dropping half of rugby.

It was hard to know if the incarnadine faces of the Sutton players were from the heat or their embarrassment. The Kent team continued the second period where they left off in the first. Within moments Lewis Bunton had added another penalty for a 30-24 lead. From the restart the catch was run back 50 metres and soon followed try number five with a strong finish on the flank by winger Stefan Linton. The touchline conversion failed but Beckenham were 35-24 ahead with 27 unanswered points. At this stage the visitors looked to be favourites to continue their hot streak and run up a cricket score. However, the pendulum swung back in favour of the Black and Whites.

A positive carry by debutant Callum Gibson offered Sutton some respite with a penalty. Captain Bunting steadied the ship and ended the drought to close the gap to 27-35. Better was to come to raise the spirits of the Rugby Lane crowd. A desperate kick and chase by Max Russell led to a 5-metre penalty. Sadly Max Russell showed all the circumspection of the Gadarene swine with the same result as the Biblical beasts as his quick tap gave away possession. Fortunately for Sutton and Epsom they soon got a penalty that reduced Beckenham to 14 men as Mr Duncan Butler-Wheelhouse issued a yellow card to captain Hans Laud-Anderson showing no empathy towards a fellow double-barrelled man. More woe fell upon the visitors as Ewan McTaggart emerged from a pile of players with a try from the 5-metre lineout to secure an Sutton and Epsom bonus point. Freddy Bunting converted expertly from the touchline to make it a one-point game with Beckenham 35-34 ahead.

It was time for the final official water break and cool heads were certainly at a premium as the game entered the final quarter. Sutton started to play with fluency, the tackling improved, turnovers were being won and the set scrum was secure. The Black and Whites regained the lead with their best team try of the afternoon. Multiple phases had Callum Gibson, Max Russell and Ciaran Mohr make gains and it was left to the vastly experienced George London to force his way over from close-range for his brace. Freddy Bunting once more converted from touch to lead 41-35 leaving Beckenham searching for a goal in the last ten minutes as a try would not suffice.

A spectacular finish ensued as the tension led to errors. Kicks went out on the full, balls were dropped and penalties neutered attacks. Then with the game in time added on the visitors had the chance to kick a penalty into the corner. Could they once again score from a 5-metre lineout? The ball was secured but the drive was held and anxious moments passed until a shrill blast of the whistle. Everyone expected a try but a penalty try was a surprise to those seeking shelter from the sun in the grandstand. Instead of a very challenging conversion from the flank Beckenham had an automatic 7-point score and had regained the lead 42-41. Surely that was the end of the drama.

With noteworthy game management the visiting pack controlled the restart. Slowly and steadily they advanced to the Sutton 22 and the Sutton and Epsom defence dared not concede a penalty but were desperate for a turnover. Unexpectedly Beckenham gave away a penalty and offered the hosts a lifeline. It was advanced by Bunting's boot to halfway. The lineout was secured and the endgame began. The ball went wide and the Kent territory was entered. Then the ultimate drama as Sir awarded the hosts a penalty. It was Captain Bunting who had to go to the well once more and attempt another kick from the touchline. The ball soared over the height of the uprights but inches wide and the final whistle blew. Beckenham had triumphed 42-41 and the Black and Whites had the consolation of two bonus points.

Both teams had moments of dominance but also had periods they would want to forget. It was cruel that the brilliant place-kicking of Freddy Bunting was not rewarded by one last successful strike to add to the previous magnificent seven. The Sutton scrum was a source of strength, Gareth O'Brien sidestepped his way to two tries and veteran George London also doubled up with forceful scores. Equally Beckenham had their standout performers with the powerful carrying of prop Rimarni Richards being rewarded with two tries, Dan Hamilton was central to the comeback and their lineout converted the chances they were provided with remorseless efficiency.

Next Saturday, 16<sup>th</sup> September, the charabanc will be heading to Geoffrey Knight Fields for a fixture with Old Reigatian. OR have opened their campaign with an impressive 33-7 home win against Sidcup before a 36-26 winning trip to London Cornish in round 2. Meanwhile the Black and Whites will hope it will be third time lucky as they search for their first win.

**Sutton and Epsom:** Michael Bennion, Max Russell, Ross Parsons, Freddy Bunting ©, Ciaran Mohr, Gareth O'Brien, Chris Ballard, Will Lloyd, Chris Farrell, Callum Gibson, Ewan McTaggart, Josh Glanville, George London, Rob Hegarty and Kean Orchard.Replacements: (all used) Tom Boaden, Jack Howes and Jack Briggs.

**Beckenham:** Luke Bosch, Stefan Linton, Dan Hamilton, Matt Lovell, Tom Bateman, Lewis Bunton, Ben Murphy, George Baker, Lamar Sinclair, Rimarni Richards, Ciall Kirwan, Josh Hiscott, Liam Markey, Tom Ward, Hans Laud-Anderson .Replacements: (all used)Rob Willden, Olly Stapleton and Sami Suliman.

## Reeds Weybridge 27 - Sutton & Epsom 12

11 September 2023



Following the disappointment of last season's relegation **Sutton & Epsom RFC** had a stern test in their Regional 2 South East opener with a trip to Reeds Weybridge. The hosts are one of the country's most upwardly mobile clubs with six promotions in the last eight campaigns whilst they finished third at the last time of asking. There was some compensation for missing out on their habitual climb up the rugby pyramid. An excellent cup run ended in an 18-3 defeat to league rivals Battersea Ironsides at Saracens' StoneX Stadium in the final of the inaugural Papa John's Regional 2 South Plate. For the Black & Whites it was their first league encounter with the men from Whiteley Village. S&E welcomed debutants Chris Ballard, Kean Orchard and Max Russell to the 1st XV whilst, on the other end of the scale, it was a red-letter-day for Will Lloyd as the veteran prop made his 100th 1st XV league appearance. Unfortunately, Sutton failed to open their account at the first time of asking as Reeds Weybridge deservedly won by 27-12.

On a magnificent summer's afternoon, with a cricket match in progress on the other side of the trees, S&E's new captain, Freddy Bunting, initiated proceedings kicking down the modest slope with a gentle breeze in his face. The hosts completely dominated the opening fifteen minutes. They imposed their tempo and pattern on the game. After an initial penetrative carry by a forward or two the ball was spun wide. Despite the territory and possession the forward bursts were modest rather than devastating. Sutton survived a quick tapped penalty from the alert Ollie Palmer but having cleared their lines incurred their first penalty to the new experimental tackle laws. A probing kick to the corner gave RW a great attacking platform. The first assault was repelled by a Matt Whitaker tackle but swift recycling saw the ball swung blind and an overlap was created for lock Cameron Goodwin to stride home. Jack Jesty added the extras with a sweetly struck conversion from the flank for a 7-0 lead.

Buoyed by the opening score on five minutes the Hersham men looked to stamp their authority on the game and extend their advantage. Despite the next ten minutes being one-way traffic the hosts and spectators were frustrated by the stop-start nature of the proceedings. Errors were met with a bountiful whistle as infringements and rustiness were not excused by Referee Wright. A second try for RW seemed inevitable as Coriolanian Sutton defence was required to hold their line. The ball was sent wide for an inevitable score but a diving Michael Davies intercepted a pass with a catch more familiar to cricket than rugby. The frustrated hosts conceded a penalty and the visitors cleared from under their posts.

Belatedly S&E had some possession and immediately put it to great effect. Fluent handling saw them arrive for their first visit into the alien 22. Another penalty was awarded and Bunting kicked to the corner. Before the lineout was taken prop Alex Mount was replaced by Tom Boaden. From the throw a well-executed lineout saw the mass of Black & White shirts bundle over the line. Rob Hegarty emerged from the pile to claim the try. Freddy Bunting's touchline conversion drifted wide as Reeds led 7-5. They followed a period of dominance from the men from Rugby Lane. The visitors mimicked their opposition by failing to add to their total despite the monopoly of territory and possession. Though they were unfortunate that when Ben Tame crossed the whitewash from another lineout the referee was unsighted and gave the only decision available to her and Reeds had a relieving drop out. However, the visitors only had themselves to blame for failing to secure the lead. They were turned over near the line and conceded a penalty with a try at their mercy. It was the turn of RW to show the virtues of Horatio on his famous bridge.

Sutton's profligacy was punished in the 40th minute. Chris Ballard's pass was impeded at the ruck and the loose ball was poached. Captain Bunting made an excellent tackle to stop the try but the second wave saw hooker Rhys Day score despite another thunderous tackle. Jack Jesty added the conversion to stretch the lead to 14-5. There was eight additional minutes to the half and Sutton spent more time in the far 22 but to no avail as the sides went into the interval with Reeds Weybridge 14-5 to the good.

Naturally Sutton and Epsom were desperate for the opening score of the second period. But within a minute it was the boot of Jesty that added an early penalty from in front of the posts for a healthy advantage of 17-5. The visitors played at a higher tempo but still struggled to be clinical as they tried to get back into the game. Frequent blasts of the whistle impaired both teams until the Hersham side were offered another opportunity to extend their lead. For the only occasion in the game Jack Jesty erred and S&E's task was not made any harder. Solid defence rebuffed the Black & Whites as Gareth O'Brien's scything run was halted by the offence of crossing. Reeds Weybridge then gave the visitors a lesson in scoring. From a period of sustained pressure and patient ball retention blindside Joe Wastie rounded off the attack. Normal service resumed from Jack Jesty and RW led by the sizeable margin of 24-5.

Sutton and Epsom needed a rapid reply and it came from the most familiar source. An alert Chris Ballard took a quick tap penalty then the ball was spread wide and S&E threatened again but this time Matt Whitaker was on hand to score. Freddy Bunting eased over the conversion to trail 12-24. For Reeds' Captain Herbie Finn there was not the standard scalding vituperation that often follows these moments but the sagacious advice to his troops that the game was not over. The Black & Whites needed to maintain the pressure and add to this score to create doubt in the minds of their opponents. However, careless penalties were conceded, the ball was cleared and any flames of recovery were extinguished by the commendably calm game management of the hosts.

In the last five minutes Referee Wright brandished a yellow card, going about the task with a mortician's lofty detachment from the irksome job in hand. Reeds would have to play out the game with 14 but it was too late to have a telling impact as Joe Wastie went from player to spectator. After five minutes of time added on the hosts were awarded another penalty and the



assured Jack Jesty bisected the uprights to conclude proceedings with Reeds Weybridge victorious to the tune of 27-12.

Reeds deserved their victory. Their lineout provided quality possession, their forwards carried effectively and they played at pace. Through notable absentees in their ranks they perhaps lacked that telling intervention in the back division to punch holes in the defence but they will not be overtly concerned having taken the points. Unlike Sutton and Epsom they opted to kick simple penalties and kept the opposition at arm's length. The hosts played with an excellent tempo and to their familiar pattern and imposed themselves on the game in the first quarter. They should have gained more than their solitary goal but early season rustiness will no doubt be replaced by clinical efficiency in the weeks to come. Their defence was resolute and their game management in the last quarter meant there was going to be no famous Sutton comeback.

For the visitors it was a delight to see the return of Matt Whitaker. Sutton and Epsom without Whitaker would be like Hamlet without the Prince and for the umpteenth time the opposition declared him the pick of the S&E bunch. Debutant Chris Ballard at 9 impressed with not only his service but also his ability to exploit the gaps. It was not for want of effort that centurion Will Lloyd failed to be on the winning side. He was rock solid in the scrum, made his carries and offloads as well as a crucial intervention on the line that prevented a Reeds try. Neither side benefited from the frequency of the stoppages but the Black & Whites failed to play with the fluency that was demonstrated in pre-season. One feels a victory would transform their demeanour.

Next Saturday 9th September league rugby returns to Rugby Lane with a 3pm home fixture against Beckenham RFC all are most welcome to attend.

#### **Sutton & Epsom:**

Michael Bennion, Max Russell, Michael Davies, Freddy Bunting ©, Ciaran Mohr, Gareth O'Brien, Chris Ballard, Alex Mount, Chris Farrell, Will Lloyd, Kean Orchard, Josh Glanville, Ben Tame, Rob Hegarty & Matt Whitaker.

Replacements: (all used)

Tom Boaden, Ewan McTaggart and Ross Parsons.

#### **Reeds Weybridge**

Brad Robbins, Kitan Ojo, Josh Clark, Billy Maddock, Jack Grady, Jack Jesty, Ollie Palmer, Lennan Day, Rhys Day, Riley Milsom, Cameron Goodwin, Herbie Finn ©, Joe Wastie, Lewis Jones, Michael Wasko.

Replacements: (all used)

William Scott, Shannon Fullen and Peter Daverns.

## Rugby Returning To Rugby Lane in Ewell

11 September 2023



This time last year **Sutton & Epsom Rugby Football Club** were looking optimistically at the brand new Regional 1 South Central anticipating opening their account at Lily Hill Park against Bracknell. Twelve months later following a season that was underwhelming in the extreme Sutton and Epsom came bottom of the league and were relegated. With the RFU shuffling the deck once more S&E have been placed in Regional 2 South East. For the second campaign on the bounce the Black & Whites will be welcoming some new league opponents in the form of Battersea Ironsides and Reeds Weybridge. Meanwhile they will be reacquainting themselves with familiar foes like Sidcup whilst Old Colfeians make a welcome return to Rugby Lane for the first time since 2006.

Notable players have departed for a variety of reasons including age, family life or the golf course and Messrs Caddy, Cooksammy, Drye, Harwood, Hurley & See will be hard to replace and a most grateful club offer them their heartiest best wishes for the future. But this is the cyclical nature of club rugby and it will provide an opportunity for young players to step into big boots and establish their reputation as an essential starter for the 1 st XV.

For the supporters the loss of those favourites will be compensated by the long-awaited return to the colours for Matt Whitaker following surgery after a fallow season last time around. One senior player has not hung up his boots and will be hoping for at least one more league encounter as prop Will Lloyd is currently a man with 99 league appearances under his belt and hopes to become the club's 32nd league centurion.

Head Coach Paul Hodgson commenting on the season ahead said: "Since my return back at Sutton & Epsom RFC, I don't feel there has been a more exciting time in this transition period between seasons. The main reason being is that a young crop of players, mainly graduates from the S&E RFC Junior section, will be making up the majority of the starting squad. Mixed in with a few experienced players and new faces, I feel the 1 st XV representing this great club will be a very competitive side. My prediction for the season is that there will be a lot of good times playing down at Rugby Lane and there will be some good wins achieved on the road."

As usual the league season begins on the opening Saturday in September when Sutton & Epsom travel to Whitely Village to experience an inaugural league fixture with Reeds Weybridge. For those of you who frequent Rugby Lane the first home fixture is against Beckenham on Saturday 9th September kicking off at 3pm.

Full fixtures for the season can be found on the club's website

The Rugby Lane ground can be found on this map.

## The season's final curtain

11 September 2023



Sutton & Epsom RFC 34 v Bracknell 24. Saturday 11th March.

The modern league fixture list has a marvellous symmetry as it ends against the opponent one played on the opening day of the season. Way back in September that meant a journey to Lily Hill Park to play Bracknell for the first time since the 2009-10 season. A lot of players have crossed the whitewash since then, and too many of them have been S&E's opponents, and 22 games later the season has ended. Perhaps the omens were not so favourable on Day 1 as once again as with those former times the Black & Whites were facing the denouement of the campaign having already been relegated from Level 5. On 10<sup>th</sup> April 2010 the team bid a fond farewell by thrashing North Walsham 55-15 and on this occasion Sutton & Epsom put in a rousing performance to sign off with a 34-24 triumph over Bracknell.

The game certainly had the feeling of the end of an era as James Caddy led out the side for his allegedly last appearance. Joining the stalwart back row in the departure lounge were George Drye, Sam Hurley and Jamie See, all of whom have been superb servants of the club and were instrumental in the recent rise to National 2. In addition, it was certainly a red-letter day for Chris Pointing as he celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> XV league appearance.

Despite the aforesaid reasons for one last Herculean effort S&E started the match in the worst possible manner. The unfathomable slow start that has become the byword of this season reared its ugly head again. In front of a crowd in excess of 250 Bracknell ruthlessly exposed the early Sutton frailties. The opening ten minutes hinted at an unpalatable drubbing for the Black & Whites. The outstanding Bracknell Number 8 Ken Hodgson was rampaging round Rugby Lane and soon scythed through the defence to set up Simon Bayliss for a try in the corner. Moments later the backtracking Robbie Martey cut out an assist but was shown a yellow card. With the man advantage the Berkshire men went blind exploiting another defensive oversight and Simon Bayliss strolled in for his second. On this occasion Ollie Radford added the conversion for 12-0.

As the Fab Four might have considered that the fairy tale ending to their careers was being penned by the Brothers Grimm Sutton scored. Freddy Bunting intercepted a pass in his own half and ran it back. He added the conversion for S&E to trail 7-12. The Rugby Lane men had woken from their slumber and began to defend with urgency. The Bracknell backs who had enjoyed time and space in the first quarter were being pressed on the gain line and all over the pitch Sutton tackled with a ferocity and zeal that lifted the crowd. Robbie Martey returned and was soon on the action making a vital mark on a dangerous cross-field kick. A couple of infringements and the Bunting boot put the hosts in the corner for a 5-metre lineout. The ball was secured and the pack did the necessary and George London scored. Freddy Bunting made light of the challenging conversion and the Black & Whites led 14-12.

What had looked like a relaxing end of season jaunt for the visitors had been transformed and the hosts had not finished. On the half hour the S&E pack once more lined up for another 5-metre lineout. Lightning was to strike twice and with meritorious efficiency Will Lloyd forced his way over. Freddy Bunting thumped over the conversion as the jubilant crowd roared their appreciation for the 21-12 lead. Aged followers tried to recall if they had seen their team lead at the break. The Lily Hill Park team rather taken aback by the effrontery of three scores conceded without reply threatened to end the half as it had begun. Scrum half Franklin Lewis took a quick penalty 40 metres out. Desperate defence saw Sutton fling themselves on a loose ball but a knock on gave Bracknell a scrum 15 metres out under the posts. From this prime platform to attack Ben Tame and Jamie See made crucial tackles before Ken Hodgson was held up over the line. Five minutes later the referee drew the first half to a close when Ollie Radford's promising run ended when he

was bundled into touch. Sutton turned around 21-12 to the good after a Jekyll and Hyde performance in the first period.

The second half got under way with the visitors having the advantage of the wind and keen to be the first to add to their tally on the scoreboard. An early Bracknell break was followed by a probing kick that was gathered by a wonderful sliding take by Robbie Martey 5 metres from his line. Having cleared the ball Sutton continued their fine form of the first period. The hosts spread the ball wide after powerful carries by the forwards and forced the visitors onto the defensive. Both sides were showing great defensive resolve as thunderous tackling all over the pitch thwarted the best attacking efforts of all concerned. The match ebbed and flowed until a long clearance from Freddy Bunting was taken near the touchline on halfway. The initial chaser was too easily stepped and the defensive support was inadequate. A surging run down the touchline and a simple pass inside saw lock George Jupp score. Ollie Radford impressively bisected the uprights as Bracknell trailed 19-21.

There was hardly any time for the crowd to contemplate the two-point deficit before the next score. And what a score it was by Robbie Martey. Any self-doubt in the Black & White ranks was instantly extinguished as the winger jinked and weaved his way through would be tacklers and outpaced the cover to score Sutton's try of the season. The conversion drifted wide as the hosts led 26-19. Next it was Jamie See's turn to sidestep his way down the pitch and the Rugby Lane team were awarded a penalty. Wisely they opted for the kick at goal and Freddy Bunting extended the lead to 29-19. Sutton had a ten-point lead with ten minutes left on the clock.

Perhaps the largest roar of the day greeted Chris Pointing coming off the bench for his 100<sup>th</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> XV league appearance. There have been too many near misses and eleventh hour tragedies this season for the Black & Whites and the crowd urged on the team to dig deep. The XV responded in great style. Ross Parsons made a break and the pack powered in behind him to advance the ball to the Bracknell line. It was the Berkshire men's turn to show superb defence and frustrate the Surrey men by holding them up over the line. However, Sutton gathered the drop out and countered. The ball went wide to replacement Ciaran Mohr who finished with aplomb squeezing in at the corner he stretched for the line to score despite a superb covering tackle. S&E led 34-19 as



the game entered time added on.

There was no let up in the action as Sutton again attacked. Even in the opposition 22 the hosts tackled as if they were on their own line as they denied them any space to counter. In the end it was a kick and chase by Noah Cannon that almost secured a fourth try and a bonus point for the Lily Hill Park team. Once again Robbie Martey was on hand to touch down. In was a temporary respite as moments later Noah Cannon decided on a more direct approach. He sped down the blindside delivered a jolting palm off and scored in the corner. The conversion drifted wide and Mr Foster blew the final whistle and Sutton had won 34-24.

It was a rousing end to a disappointing season and a fitting farewell to Messrs Caddy, Drye, Hurley & See. It was the best Sutton performance of the season in a match where Bracknell started in irresistible style and threatened to run away with the game. For the visitors Ken Hodgson was at the heart of everything and a constant threat. For S&E it was a wonderful team performance. The commitment to the cause was mightily impressive whether it was the tackling in defensive duties or the ball-carrying by the pack or the Bunting boot. When it was needed Robbie Martey added that sprinkling of magic on an afternoon when the Black & Whites were not to be denied. The league season may have ended but a new Cup competition follows in the weeks to come. The draw will occur next week and the date and opposition for this match will be posted in due course on the club website.

Sutton & Epsom

Alex Mawdsley, Robbie Martey, Lawrence Elliott, Freddy Bunting, Sam Hurley, Jamie See, Ross Parsons, Tom Boaden, Chris Farrell, Will Lloyd, George Drye, Josh Glanville, Ben Tame, George London, James Caddy ©.

Replacements: (all used) Alex Mount, Chris Pointing & Ciaran Mohr

Bracknell

Alex Frame, Simon Bayliss, Daniel Mays, Oliver Radford, Alexander Fieldhouse, Matthew Outson, Franklin Lewis, Ruairi Henderson, Bradley Walters, Nicholas Ovens, Thomas Scott, George Jupp, James Johnson, Liam Wood, Ken Hodgson.

Replacements: (all used) Jasper Miranda, Joseph Maybey & Noah Cannon.

## The Prince of Maidenhead Reigns Supreme

11 September 2023



Sutton & Epsom RFC 26 - Maidenhead 45. Saturday 4th March.

The Black & Whites returned to Rugby Lane in the knowledge that their race had been run this season. The men in magenta had torn them to shreds at Braywick Park in November and both squads were fully aware of that outcome. Despite the match having no consequence with regard to the league table or which cup competition would be entered both sides produced a thrilling spectacle played at breakneck pace with eleven tries to applaud. Maidenhead won by 45-26 but Sutton restored their pride with a performance that deservedly earned them a bonus point.

It might have been the first Saturday in March but there was no sign of spring in the air as Freddy Bunting started the match with a biting wind behind him. From the outset it was clear that the visitors were going to utilise their excellent back division and run the ball from anywhere. This scenario was no surprise to the hosts whose defensive line on the Berkshire 22 held firm despite several efforts to break free. Reluctantly Maidenhead cleared with the boot. S&E's first possession proved to be most productive. The covering Caddy charged towards the 22 and after several swift phases Alex Mawdsley's perfectly timed pass allowed Robbie Martey to score. Freddy Bunting added the conversion for 7-0.

That instant success focussed the Maidenhead minds and within five minutes they had not only drawn level but had taken the lead. Though Sutton safely secured the restart after a few phases near halfway the opted to kick. Their opponent countered at pace searching for space on the right before switching to the opposite flank. An arcing run by centre Harry Wells set up the prolific Alex Turton who ran round under the posts. Moments later Harry Wells turned from provider to scorer. A long clearance into the Surrey men's 22 was run back but the ball was turned over and the alert Harry Wells swept down the unguarded blindside to score. Greg Smith converted both scores and the boys from Braywick Park led 14-7 after a magnificent seven opening minutes.

There was no respite from the high tempo as both teams threw themselves headlong into attack. Equally both sides were demonstrating resolute defence. At the start of the second quarter the Black & Whites encamped within five minutes of glory. Jordan Huie went close, a 5-metre catch and drive was denied and a golden opportunity to level the scores was missed. Then to heap Pelion upon Ossa the visitors cleared their lines and scored with their next attack. Harry Wells was a central figure again as he put Greg Smith into space. The fly half burst into enemy territory and was only stopped by an excellent tackle by Alex Mawdsley but the ball was soon in the hands of Scott Prince who ran in the last 30 metres for the first of his three tries of the afternoon. Greg Smith, perfection personified, added the extras for 21-7.

Excellent Sutton defence from the restart regained possession and moments later the hosts had a penalty. A well-rehearsed lineout ploy saw George Drye rampage down the touchline. The ball was spun wide to the opposite flank where Jordan Huie was thwarted by excellent cover. A minute later it was Chris Farrell throwing himself at the line like a torpedo who went agonising close and a shrill blast from Mr Dixon's whistle gave Maidenhead a relieving penalty. Very soon relief became a form of cruel and unusual punishment. A speculative kick ahead by Scott Prince enjoyed a favourable bounce and the ball was transferred to fullback James Maddern who coasted home to score. Greg Smith celebrated the bonus point try with another conversion for 28-7. With the interval rapidly approaching the hosts desperately needed some reward for their first half endeavours. It was now S&E's turn to run back a clearance kick and score. Robbie Martey evaded the first man, sped through the gap and drawing the retreating defence onto him he passed to Jamie See who did well to cover the last 10 metres to touch down. Freddy Bunting added the conversion as the referee concluded the first half with the magenta men 28-14 ahead.

Despite the score-line the Black & Whites had had the majority of the possession and territory as well as more minutes in their opponent's 22. However, the visitors were ruthless in exploiting any errors as well as additionally demonstrating scintillating back play.

Sutton enjoyed the perfect start to the second period with a try. Despite failing to secure the 5-metre lineout they regained possession and this time they were not to be denied close to the line. Appropriately George London was the scorer on an afternoon when he carried with relentless aggression and to great effect. Trailing 19-28 S&E were right back in the contest. It was now the turn of the Braywick Park boys to turn the screw in the Sutton 22. Time and again the Rugby Lane men scythed down the opposition but the Maidenhead team patiently retained possession until a long pass found Scott Prince who crossed the whitewash for the second time. Though the conversion drifted wide the visitors had a 14-point cushion leading 33-19 with half an hour to go. Despite dominating the next fifteen minutes with George Drye to the fore with rampaging runs synonymous of classic locks throughout the ages S&E erred at the crucial moment. Whether it was a lineout infringement or pressure from the organised and resolute opposition defence they failed to add to their score. To massage sodium chloride into the laceration Maidenhead needed the merest glimpse of a chance to see them adding to their account. A turnover near their line led to an audacious counter that saw captain Niall Crossley put into space and stride in from 40 metres. With Greg Smith having departed with an earlier injury scrum half Archie Dunnill took over the kicking duties and bisected the uprights for 40-19.

Making light of the latest setback Sutton continued the search for a fourth try and a bonus point. The remarkable pace of the game did not relent and the attacks rained down at either end. A jinking run by Dan Jones hinted at greater deeds. Then five minutes later Alex Mawdsley made a break on halfway but his errant pass was gathered by Scott Prince who needed no second invitation to sprint in unopposed to complete his hat trick. The challenging conversion drifted wide and Maidenhead led 45-19. The game entered time added on and the Black & Whites continued their quest for the Holy Grail of the bonus point. Agonisingly they were held up over the line. Then with the final play of the afternoon there was at last ecstasy after so much agony. Fittingly the score followed another charge from George Drye and an incisive burst from Robbie Martey to set up Freddy Bunting for his first league try for the Black & Whites. He failed to convert his score and the referee ended the contest with Maidenhead 45-26 victors.

In the end it was Maidenhead's superior quality that told in an enthralling contest. Harry Wells was at the creative heart and wingers Prince and Turton were a constant menace with the former taking the glory with his triple. The Black & Whites more than played a supporting role in this fixture. The back row trio of Messrs Tame, London and Caddy were exceptional as they tackled, harried and carried throughout. George Drye played like a man possessed, as ever Steve Munford tackled everything that moved and parenthood has not blunted Jamie See's talents. For S&E it was an afternoon when every error was punished with brutal efficiency whilst they failed to make the most of their chances. That being said they took the game to one of the best attacking sides in the league from their early opening score to their bonus point try on the final play of the game and deserve great credit for their performance.

The season concludes for Sutton & Epsom next Saturday with the visit of Bracknell who defeated the Black & Whites on the opening day of the season. The kick off at Rugby Lane will be 3pm. It is hoped that a sizable crowd will be present to bid a fond farewell to the departing quartet of Sam Hurley, James Caddy, Jamie See and George Drye who have given many years of devoted service to the team and have been instrumental in the club's recent successes.

#### Sutton & Epsom

Alex Mawdsley, Jordan Huie, Sam Hurley, Jamie See, Robbie Martey, Freddy Bunting, Steve Munford, Tom Boaden, Chris Farrell ©, Will Lloyd, George Drye, Josh Glanville, Ben Tame, George London & James Caddy.

Replacements: (all used) Joe Reid, Dan Jones & Joe Lovatt.

#### Maidenhead

James Maddern, Scott Prince, Harry Wells, Niall Crossley ©, Alex Turton, Greg Smith, Archie Dunnill, Elio Mandozzi, Jake Leach, Finlay Glass, Brook Harvey-Smith, Mark Grimshaw, Chris Gill, William Macaulay & Ed Atkins.

Replacements: Dan Hostetler, Mykel Parrott & Charlie

## Sutton and Epsom RFC Sink Despite All Hands On Deck

11 September 2023



Brighton 39 Sutton & Epsom 22. Saturday 25th February. The last of Epsom and Sutton's rearranged fixtures sadly fell on a weekend that not only featured the Six Nations but also a couple of stag weekends. Creativity was the byword for selection as 2 nd XV players, veterans of yesteryear, coaches and university students gathered at Waterhall for the formal introductions before taking on the Blues. In September at Rugby Lane the Black & Whites enjoyed one of only two successes this campaign when they overcame Brighton 42-24. The south coast men gained a measure of revenge winning 39-22 which eased their fears of the drop but the result relegated S&E because remarkably at Bodicote Park Banbury had defeated second-placed Camberley.

The Sutton and Epsom XV included the veteran trio of Frankie Murray and the brothers Pointing, Chris and Mickey, debutants Jordan Farrar and Alex Gerhard from the Swallows, students Jack Benton and Taylor Gaye and coaches Steve Munford and Mark Lambert. Tom Brooker took the armband and was the only remaining member of the pack from last Saturday's Havant loss. The clouds dispersed and the game started in sunshine but with a strong wind that was illustrated as the Brighton kick off sailed out on the full. The majority of the crowd wisely took advantage of the well-appointed clubhouse rather than braving the elements pitch-side for a match of great significance for both clubs in terms of survival in this league. The hosts looked to spread the ball from the outset and their back division with Onke Nesi to the fore was lively and threatening. S&E tackled ferociously and the pack willingly took on the ball-carrying duties.

After ten minutes winger Aled Edwards thought he had wriggled free but was brought back for a foot in touch. The Waterhall woes were immediately abated when centre Arthur Robinson scythed through the defence after sustained Brighton pressure to score. In the absence of the redoubtable Sean O'Hagan scrum half Harry Alexander took over the kicking duties and made light of the tricky wind to make it 7-0. Five minutes later the Sutton resources were further stretched when Kyren Ghumra was forced off after a knock on the head when falling on the ball. With no spare back on the bench Jordan Farrar went on the flank and Jack Butt stood in on the wing. Despite the adversity the Black & Whites were tenacious in defence and the forwards relished the set scrums with the experienced duo of Reid and Lambert winning penalties.

The Sussex men had to wait until the half hour to extend their lead. A well-worked lineout ploy from 5 metres was thwarted but prop Billy Rolfe twisted and stretched for the line to score. The conversion drifted wide as the hosts led 12-0. Sutton & Epsom brought on Hartpury University prop Taylor Gaye for his debut and he made an immediate impact. The diminutive Dan Jones won a penalty for a high tackle which was kicked into the corner. Though the lineout was lost excellent scavenging by the pack regained possession and Taylor Gaye scored from short-range. The conversion was blown wide but Sutton were on the board trailing 5-12. Confidence now surged through the Black & White ranks and they were soon attacking in the Blues 22. With the interval rapidly approaching the referee issued a yellow card to Billy Rolfe. At once Sutton looked to benefit from their numerical advantage. The forwards got to within a yard under the posts before it was spun wide. It appeared that Angus Findlay had scored in the corner but an excellent defensive covering tackle dislodged the ball as the winger tried to touch down. Brighton cleared their lines from the scrum and the referee concluded the first period with the Blues 12-5 up at the break. If S&E were despondent at their failure to score before the interval you would not have noticed by the way they started the second half. Robbie Martey caught a clearance on halfway and advanced towards the 22. Captain Brooker kept up the attack and ball came to Dan Jones who jinked his way to the line and passed to Frankie Murray who scored a try that rolled back the years. The conversion narrowly missed but Sutton were only 10-12 down with the extra man.

Before the travelling Rugby Lane faithful had time to dream of a remarkable victory they were awoken from their reverie by an instant reply from the Waterhall men. Having secured a scrum on the 22 from the restart the ball went out to Arthur Robinson who ran the perfect line to score his second and Brighton's third try. Harry Alexander added the extras for the 19-10 lead. Conditions deteriorated rapidly as the clouds gathered, the rain fell and the temperature plummeted with half an hour remaining on the clock.

The hosts began to turn the screw with two tries in as many minutes. First to benefit was returning prop Billy Rolfe who collected his second of the afternoon after relentless pressure from the Sussex men. Moments later Aled Edwards was touching down in the corner and the Black & Whites were 29-10 adrift. Entering the final quarter the impartial observer might have thought that the visitors may have run out of steam and the veterans made to suffer. The floodgates did not open and contrary to all expectations S&E began their rearguard action. The next score was an unlikely one when Brighton decided to kick a penalty with ten minutes remaining. Harry Alexander effortlessly bisected the uprights for 32-10 leaving the visitors needing four scores. The task went from uphill to climbing Everest in flip-flops when replacement Conor Scott sped in under the posts finishing with aplomb. Harry Alexander converted for 39-10.

Then Tom Brooker gave a splendid example of leading from the front. Gathering the ball near halfway he took the ball in to contact and drove back three defenders and broke through their clutches and bolted towards the posts. He finished in style brushing aside the last tackler as if he was Alex Dombrandt. Alex Mawdsley drop-kicked the conversion in a blink of an eye for 39-17. Sutton now went in search of a bonus point and took the game to Brighton. Unfortunately scrum half Austin Bell was forced off with an ankle injury and S&E shuffled the deck again. Undaunted by this setback they invaded the opposition 22 again. Quick ball was spun wide and Alex Mawdsley forced his way over. Whether he applied the coup de grace or the significant pressure was supplied by Robbie Martey was immaterial as the referee signalled a try. Alex Mawdsley failed to convert from the flank and the referee blew his whistle to end the game with Brighton victorious by 39-22.

The Blues were worthy winners. Their forwards carried aggressively and effectively and their backs looked to run at every opportunity and had plenty of pace to exploit their somewhat makeshift opponents. The bonus point win was most welcome as the hosts are still not clear of relegation. In contrast this defeat condemned the visitors to the drop. However, the manner of defeat will be cherished by the Rugby Lane supporters. The level of commitment, the tenacity and the bonus point were highlights in a display overflowing with team spirit. Steve Munford gave an outstanding performance in defence tackling all-comers. The many front row permutations were a constant menace in the scrum. The side benefited greatly from the leadership on the pitch from not only Tom Brooker but also the cadre of experienced players that filled their ranks. On the other end of the scale, the youthful debutants Alex Gerhard, Jordan Farrar and Taylor Gayle put in huge shifts and looked very comfortable at 1 st XV level which bodes well for the future.

Though the season has come to a premature end for Sutton & Epsom, followers of Brighton will hope Wimbledon and Havant will reflect their lofty status and put Banbury to the sword unlike the faltering Camberley so that the Blues stay put in Regional One South Central. Next Saturday S&E entertain Maidenhead at Rugby Lane in the penultimate game of the season.

Sutton & Epsom

Robbie Martey, Kyren Ghumra, Steve Munford, Alex Mawdsley, Angus Findlay, Frankie Murray, Austin Bell, Mark Lambert, Dan Jones, Joe Reid, Alex Gerhard, Jack Benton, Chris Pointing, Jack Butt & Tom Brooker ©

Replacements: (all used) Mickey Pointing, Jordan Farrar & Taylor Gaye.

Brighton

Max Morris ©, George Payne, Arthur Robinson, Onke Nesi, Aled Edwards, David McIlwaine, Harry Alexander, Billy Rolfe, Will Fitzpatrick, Andrew Rowlandson, Richard Neil, Milo Cawkwell, George Orchard, Alex Havers & Angus North.

Replacements: James Trevis, Will Harvey and Conor Scott.

## Wimbledon on the Up and Up

11 September 2023

Sutton & Epsom Women 20 Wimbledon Women 43. Saturday 18th February. Sutton & Epsom had enjoyed a comfortable 26-0 triumph at Beverley Meads in November. However, they were only too aware that that result bore no resemblance to the recent form of the Dons. In 2023 they have taken the scalps of not only Hammersmith & Fulham last week but also the Guildford Gazelles and most notably Battersea Ironsides. After 80 minutes of thrilling rugby and an eleven-try bonanza Wimbledon returned to SW20 with the points after an exhilarating 43-20 triumph.



Hannah Gutteridge kicked off for the visitors on a mild and sunny afternoon that was ideal for running rugby and both teams capitalised on the conditions. After the initial sparring with both sets of forwards carrying the ball ferociously and being met with thunderous tackles it was the Barham Road team who opened the scoring. The Dons were awarded a penalty when an S&E player failed to roll away. A splendid tackle by Abby Wynne thwarted the first sortie but it was spread wide for Jade Whareate to squeeze in at the corner for a 5-0 lead. The game went from end to end as Sutton tried to get onto level terms whilst Wimbledon sought to extend their lead. With Aegean Leech to the fore the Dons defence stood firm.

Sutton suffered a self-inflicted wound when Abby Wynne's long clearance was brought back due to S&E players failing to retreat. Gifted with free possession and the bonus of a penalty on the host's 22 the visitors exploited the situation to the maximum. Fluent play from the backs set up Maddie Healey who finished with aplomb out wide. Trailing 0-10 the Rugby Lane team were also forced into a change as an injured Hannah Smith was replaced by Natalie McCall. Maddie Healey was soon in the thick of the action once more with another electric burst of pace which should have created a try but the ball hit the deck when the line was begging.

The fates then conspired against the Black & Whites as a raking clearance kick from Hannah Gutteridge took the cruellest of bounces to wrong foot the cover. Maddie Healey got to the ball first and intelligently fly-hacked the ball to the vacant in-goal area. The quicksilver winger won the race to the line to touchdown for her second try of the afternoon. Hannah Gutteridge made light of the challenging conversion to extend Wimbledon's lead to 17-0. Sutton & Epsom pressed hard to get on the scoreboard before the break. The Dons knocked on the restart and provided the perfect platform on the 22 for an S&E attack but once more they could not find a way through the opposition defences. In addition winger Ella Zeqiri was injured in a tackle and had to be replaced by Lucy Hoad. All the hosts' efforts were in vain as the first period ended with Wimbledon leading 17-0.

Sutton & Epsom were pro-active at the break and brought Joanne Evans and Jayne Maddox off the bench as they went in search of an early score in the second half. The latter made an immediate impact with her running and probing boot. However, the next score went to the visitors. A stunning break by fullback Ellie Seagrave put the S&E defence under severe pressure. The hosts conceded a 5-metre penalty. A couple of rumbling carries by the SW20 pack narrowed the defence and then the ball was spun wide. Zoe Johnson was on hand for the clinical finish to earn the bonus point for Try Number 4.

Sutton now mounted a stunning comeback. Aegean Leach stole the ball and her swift counter nearly led to a try. The retreating defence were forced into conceding a penalty and the referee issued a yellow card. The Black & Whites took immediate advantage of their numerical superiority with the tap penalty sent wide where Joanne Evans battled her way over the line to score. Trailing 5-22 the crowd only had a moment to draw breath before they were cheering another Sutton score. S&E secured the restart and Jayne Meadows crossfield kick was gathered but a bone-shaking tackle from Aegean Leach turned over the ball and the talismanic Sutton back set off for the line from halfway. Her powerful run down the touchline culminated in a jolting hand-off to the last defender before scoring. The visitors' lead was now only 22-10 and they were still 14.

It was now Jayne Meadows turn to turnover the ball. Natalie McCall was awarded a penalty after a strong carry which was quickly taken and Jayne Meadows carried it to the 22. The ball was spun wide until Aegean Jones cut back and her angled run saw her collect her second score under the posts. The momentum of the match had swung dramatically in the hosts' favour as they now only trailed 15-22. However, their wings were clipped when not only they temporarily lost the influential Joanne Evans to a yellow card for a high tackle but they also lost Aegean Leech to an injury.

It was now Wimbledon's turn to take advantage of the yellow card scenario. A fabulous run from depth by Ellie Seagrave fielding a Jayne Meadows clearance almost saw the 15 score but support was on hand from replacement Shenay Nurse who crossed the whitewash. Hannah Gutteridge added the extras for 29-15 and clear water between the two teams. Sutton returned to attack mode and a flurry of penalties saw another yellow card being awarded to one of the Dons. S&E failed to convert the pressure from 5 metres out and Hannah Gutteridge relieved the pressure with a huge clearance kick. They say a kick is only as good as the chase and Shenay Nurse raced after the ball and her pressure resulted in a knock on. The visitors were in no mood to ease off and centre Jade Whareate scored a marvellous solo effort to garner her second try of the afternoon. Hannah Gutteridge bisected the uprights as the Beverley Meads team stretched their advantage to 36-15.

Joanne Evans returned as S&E sought out at least a solitary bonus point for the fourth try. But Wimbledon had not finished and as if she had felt left out of the action outside centre Sophie Jackson set off in search of glory. Her powerful run carved through the defence and she had enough in reserve to burst through the last tackle and score under the posts. Hannah Gutteridge added her fourth conversion of the afternoon to make it 43-15. However, the final moment belonged to Lucy Hoad. The winger collected the ball near halfway and began an arcing run across the width of the pitch, having outflanked the defence she only had one opponent left who she promptly sidestepped for a stunning score. That concluded the scoring on a pulsating afternoon of rugby.

Wimbledon deservedly won the contest 43-20 with their excellent back division scoring a magnificent seven tries. On the back of the strong ball-carrying of their forwards the distribution, handling and finishing of their backs showed what can be done with exemplary core skills. The revitalised Sutton after the break seriously threatened to overturn the 22-point deficit and the final margin of defeat probably did not reflect the competitive nature of this wonderful contest. Next Sunday, 26 th February, Sutton & Epsom will be looking to return to winning ways when they travel to the Guildford Gazelles who they have yet to play this season.

#### Sutton & Epsom

Abby Wynne, Ella Zeqiri, Rachel Kinsella, Olivia Lambe, Charlotte Mahoney, Aegean Leech, Zoe Smith, Tia Jones, Caroline Styan, Hannah Smith, Beth Evans, Robyn Bloomfield, Alice Clarke, Bernadette Rees & Harriet Forsyth.

Replacements: Georgina Farrington, Isabelle Keith, Lucy Hoad, Natalie McCall, Joanne Evans, & Jayne Meadows.

#### Wimbledon

Ellie Seagrave, Zoe Johnston, Sophie Jackson, Jade Whareate, Maddie Healey, Hannah Gutteridge, Sophie Blackett, Nikeisha Hendricks, Willow Ingleton, Maryam Nejand, Zoe Adams, Zoe Leake, Tracey Smith, Heather McNaughtan & Lucy Boiling.

Replacements: Stacey Malinowski, Karen Williams, Shenay Nurse, Jennifer Crooke & Lauren Morton.



## Knights give Sutton & Epsom a hard day

11 September 2023



Havant RFC 50 – Sutton & Epsom 5. Saturday 18th February.

The traditional close encounters of the rugby kind between Sutton & Epsom and Havant had a Rugby Lane resurrection in November when the Hampshire men secured a hard fought 30-27 success. The Hooks Lane faithful are enjoying a splendid campaign this season having eight wins out of nine at home with only the table-topping Dons have downed their colours to the tune of 16-11 in a game where the hosts suffered four yellow cards. It was always going to be a mighty challenge for the Black & Whites against the club sitting second in the league and there was to be no underdog story as Havant enjoyed an 8-try triumph by 50-5.

On a cold, overcast afternoon with the sound of the rattlers in the grandstand Freddie Bunting kicked off the match. The opening five minutes was one-way traffic and the blue sign with the white arrow was pointing towards the Sutton try-line. Eschewing thoughts of kicking the ball Havant were keen to stretch the legs of their stylish back division. The initial sparring ended with the ball being brought back for a penalty that the hosts kicked to within 15 metres of the visitors' line. Ross Parkins caught the lineout and the forwards advanced. The backs were released and a long pass introduced fullback Cam Smith into the line and relishing the gap in the defence he opened the scoring. Though the conversion drifted wide it was 5-0 to Havant and moment later it would be 12-0. Following concerted pressure Reuben Knight was stopped under the posts but a dextrous backhanded pass out of the tackle gifted brother Joel the simplest of scores and he added the extras to boot.

Sutton & Epsom are not unfamiliar with trailing matches in the first quarter this season. Finally, they had some phases but having made little progress they were advanced by a well-placed Freddie Bunting kick. Soon after they won a penalty and chose to decline the 3-point option and they kicked into the corner. The disappointment at losing the 5-metre lineout was replaced instantly by euphoria. Havant tapped the ball into their in-goal area and Tom Brooker reacted the quickest for a Sutton try. Though the conversion from the flank drifted narrowly wide the Black & Whites only trailed 5-12. From the restart problems began to mount for the visitors. They were penalised under pressure at the scrummage. The ball was kicked into the corner and the initial triumph of halting the Havant catch and drive was tempered by James Caddy being shown a yellow card. The hosts took advantage of their numerical superiority with Try Number 3. The next 5-metre lineout was overthrown but recovered by Reuben Knight and from the ruck the ever-alert Ben Holt sniped from close-range. The errant conversion meant that it was now 17-5 to the Bedhampton boys at the end of the first quarter.

In the Rugby Lane fixture Havant were denied the bonus point being tryless in the second period. Invoking that spirit Sutton set forth to reduce the deficit. The pressure from the Surrey men saw Havant receive a yellow card as Will Brock left the fray. Just before that Mr Tompkins was very busy with his notebook when James Caddy returned S&E emptied their bench as Messrs Bell, Boaden & Tame were replaced by Messrs Farrell, Parsons & London, though the latter had temporarily switched with Baptiste-Wilson for an earlier scrummage. This was tactical rather than injury-induced. Though Sutton Mark 2 fared little better against the Hooks Lane XV who were not prepared to rest on their laurels. Robust running from flanker Wes Dugan saw him swat away would-be tacklers and touchdown

under the posts. Joel Knight added the easiest of conversions for 24-5 and a bonus point was deposited into the bank. The hosts had not finished and rounded off the first half with their fifth try. The ball found Harry Carr on the flank who used his speed and strength to score in the corner. The conversion failed but the hosts led 29-5 and soon after the half concluded and the teams retreated to the warmth of their dressing rooms for words of encouragement.

The hosts were in no mood for charity and extended their lead within five minutes of the restart. The Sutton cause was not helped by dropping the kick-off that gifted territory and possession to the Havant XV. After sustained pressure Joel Knight forced his way over from short distance for his second, and Havant's sixth, try. The centre converted his try for a 36-5 lead. The Hooks Lane coaches rang the changes in personnel in a more singular fashion than the visitors. Firstly, the sizeable lineout presence of Ross Parkins was replaced by Matt Whitehead and five minutes later Jonah North was swapped for Rory Penfold on the wing. The Black & Whites started to enjoy more possession but their improving efforts were undone by poor passing. The Hampshire scrum-half, Ben Holt, fell victim to white line fever and ignored Richard Janes to be held up over line by excellent S&E cover. Moments later the errant Holt made amends and finished clinically from a metre. Joel Knight bisected the uprights for 43-5.

The game entered the final quarter with the result beyond doubt but plenty to play for in terms of pride. Whether it was going to be a case of damage limitation or a spirited finale with consolation scores for Sutton remained to be seen. George London, as he has done

so often before, took the game to the opposition, driving his tackler back yards in contact he sought to inspire the Black & Whites. Their followed a bizarre passage of play when the visitors turned over the ball four times in just over a minute. To be fair drizzle and dropping temperatures had made handling increasingly challenging as the game became somewhat scrappy.

Inside the last ten minutes winger Harry Carr produced a moment of brilliance with a blindside break at express pace. Though he was denied the individual glory replacement Matt Whitehead was on hand for the final flourish to score Havant's eighth try. Joel Knight made it five from eight from his boot that added to his brace of tries brought his personal tally to 20 points in the 50-5 scoreline. Soon after Ben Holt added a yellow card to his entertaining afternoon and retired to the sidelines and Wes Dugan stepped in at 9. Sutton, with the extra man, pressed hard for a consolation try. Teams do not sit second in the table if they have a porous defence and the hosts defended their line as if they led by a solitary point rather than 45. Time and again thumping tackles repelled the S&E pack. The ball went wide and the adamant line stood firm as the Rugby Lane men knocked on. Havant cleared and the Black & White army retreated with renewed sympathy for Sisyphus. In the last knockings it was the hosts who looked like ending with a final score. A fine break by Joel Knight saw the inside pass blocked. Then Harry Carr was denied a try as he just failed to reach his chip ahead. The referee blew his whistle and Havant had deservedly won with a bonus point by 50-5.

The combination of robust ball carrying forwards and dynamic backs spearheaded by the trio of Knights was more than enough to defeat the visitors. For the Black & Whites it was the third Saturday on the trot against top three opposition and once more it was a case of spirited resistance in adversity. Their cause was not helped by early scotomata in their

defensive alignment. Though they had to make do with limited territory and possession they were too often undone by errant passing.

Next Saturday S&E head to the coast to fulfil the Brighton fixture that succumbed to the freezing temperatures before Christmas. At Rugby Lane in September the Black & Whites enjoyed their finest hour with a thrilling 42-24 triumph and would dearly love a repeat performance.

#### **Sutton & Epsom**

Alex Mawdsley, Kyren Ghumra, Sam Hurley, Lawrence Elliott, Ollie Baptiste-Wilson, Freddy Bunting, Austin Bell, Tom Boaden, Alex Mount, Will Lloyd, George Drye ©, Josh Glanville, Ben Tame, James Caddy & Tom Brooker.

Replacements: (all used) Chris Farrell, George London, & Ross Parsons.

#### **Havant**

Cam Smith, Harry Carr, Joel Knight ©, Jacob Knight, Jonah North, Reuben Knight, Ben Holt, Luke Marks, Sean Shepherd, Tam Lindsay, Richard Janes, Ross Parkins, Will Brock, Wes Dugan & Dylan Lawley.

Replacements: Jez Smith, Matt Whitehead & Rory Penfold.

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## Hackney Impress To Dent Sutton's Title Ambitions

11 September 2023

Hackney Women 32 Sutton & Epsom Women 17. Sutton & Epsom womens rugby had not played a match since their 8 th January victory at Hammersmith & Fulham. They had been frustrated by the weather when hosting Hampstead and then endured the unexpected decision by table-toppers Battersea Ironsides to forfeit their fixture. The result was five weeks of competitive inactivity as they travelled to Hackney who were looking for revenge for the 22-5 defeat they suffered at the hands of S&E at Rugby Lane in November. The host's honour was restored with a hard fought 32-17 victory over the Black & Whites.

Hackney kicked off on a gloomy but still Sunday afternoon thankfully free from rain. The visitors failed to deal with the kick which would be a portent for things to come. Hesitation from Sutton and pressure from Hackney saw the hosts turn over the ball to gain possession in a prime position. S&E were under considerable strain defending scrums, lineouts and penalties in their 22 as the Londoners pressed for the opening score. Courageous defence against the rampant forwards delayed an inevitable score until it was spun wide for fullback Rachel Castola to squeeze in at the corner. The challenging conversion was missed but it was first blood to Hackney who led 5-0.

Sutton & Epsom went in search of a rapid reply forcing their opponents back into their 22. An offside penalty was kicked to the corner for the 5-metre lineout. The disappointment of losing the throw was immediately offset by a magnificent turnover. The backs were released and Aegean Leech finished with aplomb in the corner despite the attention of several defenders. With the scores level at 5-5 the Rugby Lane team prepared for the restart. Once again they invited pressure on themselves by not dealing adequately with the kick. In no time at all Hackney had the ball in their hands and took advantage of an overlap with a clinical finish on the flank by winger Allie Nelkom to restore Hackney's lead at 10-5.

Sutton returned to the offensive with Beth Evans carrying powerfully. The referee's whistle became a regular feature with a particular penchant for offside. As the offences mounted up the official issued a stern warning that the next infringement near the line would be costly. True to his word he flourished a yellow card to give S&E numerical superiority. At once the Black & Whites took advantage and Beth Evans, running an intelligent angle, took the pass near the ruck and was unstoppable from close-range. Another conversion fell short and it was all-square once more at 10-10.

The pendulum swung back with Hackney on the attack as their powerful pack provided plenty of ball. The pressure was ceaseless from the hosts and the defence heroic by the visitors. Twice players were held up over the line but the drop out clearance just initiated another attack from Hackney. Finally, Louise Edwards scored under the posts and with the conversion successful S&E trailed once more by 17-10. There were no further additions to the score as both sides listened to the sagacious words of their coaches during the interval. For the hosts it was a question of whether they could maintain their effort as they were dominant in the scrum or whether the tremendous workload already put in by their pack would see them fade in the latter stages. For the visitors they needed to reply once again and return to parity on the scoreboard and start to impose themselves on the game.

The second period started with Aegean Leech on a one-woman mission to level the scores. Taking the game by the scruff off the neck she took a quick tap penalty near halfway and was only halted in the 22. The retreating defence was penalised again and another Aegean Leech tap and go penalty saw her cross the whitewash. The conversion



was added and for the third time Sutton had levelled the scores. It was the perfect start to the half but whether this was the turning of the tide remained to be seen. The opening exchanges of the second period saw an outbreak of tactical kicking by both teams eager to establish the territorial advantage to attack. It was Hackney who once more took the lead. A tremendous break by Ella Harte put S&E on the back foot and it needed superlative defensive tackling from fullback Abby Wynne and Beth Evans to prevent the score. But the hosts would not be denied and Allie Nelkon collected her second try of the afternoon to regain the advantage at 22-17. Thunderous tackling and tremendous swarming pressure from Hackney buoyed by their tireless pack forced handling errors by Sutton. This time the visitors could not reply and ten minutes later it was the hosts who replied. Pouncing on a dropped ball the Londoners countered and the increasingly prominent centre Nia Watson-Campbell forced her way over the line. Hackney now had clear water and led 27-17. The Black & Whites made every effort to get back on terms but the Hackney defence stood firm and did not allow the visitors any further addition to their tally. In fact the only additional score was from the hosts. Following a rather scrappy sequence of knock ons near halfway centre Ella Harte gathered the ball and set off for glory. A wonderful covering tackle in the corner by Zoe Smith denied the outside centre but her centre partner in crime Nia Watson-Campbell was rewarded for her excellent supporting run with her second try. That concluded the scoring and Hackney had deservedly won by 32-17. It was a pulsating contest with nine tries between two evenly matched sides. Hackney had the upper hand in the scrums and had the benefit of being able to play on the front foot whereas S&E ball came on the retreat. Great credit must be given to the Hackney pack who were relentless from the first minute to the last carrying the ball powerfully and aggressively gaining those hard yards with flanker Camilla Turchetti quite outstanding. The backs finished clinically with Allie Nelkon collecting a brace of tries but it was the centre combination of Nia Watson-Campbell, who also scored twice, and Ella Harte that ensured that their possession was put to good use. For Sutton & Epsom there was much to be commended. Emily Grainger’s thunderous tackling set the tone for the determined pack with Beth Evans was very prominent in the loose. The talented back division did their utmost with limited possession with Aegean Leech to the fore. The defence was exceptional near their own line with fullback Abby Wynne making several try-saving tackles. Ultimately Hackney enjoyed the majority of the territory and possession and made good that statistical advantage. Though this was a disappointing result in terms of their title aspirations their chances for glory still lie in their own hands and were aided by Wimbledon defeating Hammersmith & Fulham 31-14. Sutton & Epsom return to Rugby Lane next Sunday 19 th February for the visit of local rivals Wimbledon. The kick off will be at 2:30pm as the Black & Whites look to return to winning ways and press on towards the Promised Land of Promotion in what is turning out to be a most fascinating and competitive league.

Sutton & Epsom  
 Abby Wynne, Lucy Hoad, Aegean Leech, Olivia Lambe, Rachel Kinsella, Joe Evans, Zoe Smith, Tia Jones, Harriet Forsyth, Beth Evans, Robyn Bloomfield, Isabelle Keith, Alice Clarke, Bernadette Rees & Emily Grainger.  
 Replacements: Georgina Farrington, Natalie McCall, Charlotte Mahoney, Holly St George.  
 Hackney  
 Rachel Castola, Alex Nelkon, Ella Harte, Nia Watson-Campbell, Caroline Mitchell, Katie McAndrew, Flora Gibbons, Jessica Evans, Vanessa Riscado, Louise Edwards, Beth Patterson, Zara-Louise O’Toole, Camilla Turchetti, Carol Anderson, & Zoe Durbin.  
 Replacements: Kate Davidson, Ka Ling, Diane Anstis, Victoria Bibby, Justine Despins & Megan Hollyman.

## Top thrashes bottom

11 September 2023



Sutton & Epsom RFC 5 - Wimbledon RFC 42 - Saturday 11th February. When these two clubs met last season the dominant Dons arrived at Rugby Lane as the unbeaten leaders after eight matches and overwhelming favourites against a Sutton and Epsom XV who were languishing with a couple of wins that included a walkover against the hapless CS Stags. S&E upset the odds and added a further dose of unpalatable medicine to their neighbours when they also beat Wimbledon at SW20 for good measure. That happy memory for Sutton & Epsom fans now seems like Ancient History as the Wimbledon juggernaut arrived on Saturday as league leaders with 17 wins on the bounce, including a November 41-10 victory over the Black & Whites, and pressing for promotion. There was to be no Hans Christian Andersen storyline nor a story penned by Roald Dahl as the visitors departed as 42-5 victors.

Image courtesy Robin Kennedy

	Team	P	W	D	L	Pts
1	Wimbledon	19	18	0	1	90
2	Havant	19	15	0	4	76
3	Camberley	17	15	0	2	
10	Banbury	17	4	2	11	27
11	Royal Wootton Bassett	18	5	0	13	26
12	Sutton & Epsom	18	2	2	14	20

Wimbledon kicked off on an afternoon unaffected by the elements and most suitable for 15-man rugby. Sadly Sutton and Epsom could not resist the Circean charms of the modern fad of aerial ping-pong that resulted in conceding the opening score. The Dons pounced on an ineffective clearance and ran the ball back past the grandstand crowd with outside centre Paul Hendry scything through the defence for his first try of a personally very productive afternoon. Ed Morgan effortlessly added the extras for a 7-0 lead. Sadly S&E’s starts have often been more pedestrian than express pace this season and the Cape Town centre added his and Wimbledon’s second try moments later. The hosts won a lineout in their 22 and Ross Parsons exploited the blindside but the ravenous visiting pack stole the ball and released their backs and Paul Hendry made the break to saunter home. Ed Morgan did the necessary and the centre was set for the fastest ever league hat trick against the Black & Whites as the hosts trailed 14-0.

The SW20 outfit were determined to turn the screw and continued to dominate proceedings with their excellent winger Ollie Kitto to the fore. Ollie Kitto is not a winger who languishes forlornly on the flank waiting for service but buzzes around the pitch like the most irritating and evasive mosquito. He was denied an assist when his legerdemain was dropped in the but he was soon crossing the whitewash. Wimbledon burst into the 22 and the ball nestled in the winger’s hands and he made light of the surrounding traffic to dance his way under the posts. Ed Morgan made it 21-0 at the end of the first quarter.

Things needed to change for the Rugby Lane team and quickly. The team dusted themselves off and reminded themselves that this was a derby game by evoking memories of not only former glories against the Dons but also of their performance against Camberley the previous Saturday as they belatedly entered the contest. Sutton and Epsom began to play with more urgency and worked tirelessly to deny their exalted visitors time and space. Their reward was instantaneous as they were awarded a penalty that they kicked into the corner. From the lineout the forwards ushered Tom Boaden over the line with clinical efficiency. The conversion from the flank drifted wide but the try injected confidence into the body of the Black & Whites. Though the league leaders enjoyed the statistical superiority in terms territory and possession for the remainder of the first period the hosts were far more competitive. The back row triumvirate of London, Hegarty and Caddy were tenacious in the tackle and on the deck and Ollie Baptiste-Wilson started to gain yardage on the extremities. There was a far more determined defence that thwarted the visitors in their quest for the vital fourth try that would secure their bonus point. Steely resolve was evident in abundance as S&E defended for the final five minutes of the first half. A flurry of a 5-metre lineouts and 5-metre penalties were all overcome as Mr Priestley ended the half with Wimbledon 21-5 to the good.

The table-toppers looked for a reprise of the start of the match and Ollie Baptiste-Wilson was forced into defensive duties as he fly-hacked the ball through the dead ball area to prevent a try. Once more Sutton stayed strong five metres from their line. The sniping effort of Rhys Morgan was denied and a subsequent surge was held up over the line. The siege was relieved as a grateful S&E accepted the drop out from under the posts.

As the Black & White defence pressed hard to deny their opponents time on the ball the error count mounted for their illustrious opponents as passes were knocked on. The cool, calm machine that had swept all before them in the opening exchanges was becoming increasingly frustrated in their search for the fourth try. What had been a ceremonial procession for the soon to be anointed champions was now a serious contest. Throughout this period the Rugby Lane team’s attempts at narrowing the deficit were thwarted by the defensive excellence of Wimbledon. Too often the host’s possession was disrupted at the breakdown by the scavenging efforts of Messrs Freeman and Pearce.

The Dons tackled with the ferocity of a side who relish their defensive duties and stripped the ball in contact on more than one occasion. In the dying embers of the third quarter the leaders finally secured their fourth try after a frustrating forty fruitless minutes. The vital score followed excellent Sutton defence that included a backpedalling interception and an excellent Austin Bell tackle but the weight of numbers finally told as Paul Hendry completed his hat trick. Ed Morgan bisected the uprights for 28-5.

The game entered the final quarter with the Dons hoping to improve on their impressive points difference in the table and Sutton searching for consoling scores. From the restart replacement Mark Scott powered his way to halfway but the support failed to fully capitalise on his break. The Barham Road Boys, more relaxed after the bonus point, forced another drop out as they encamped in Black & White territory. They were rewarded with a fine score from a scrum. A quick strike was gathered and a couple of passes exchanged saw fullback Ally Duddell surge to the line. The impeccable Ed Morgan converted for 35-5. From the restart the hosts pressed hard to add to the scoreboard.

Ross Parsons took a quick tap penalty and made yards but it was brought back for Sutton and Epsom to have a second chance with a kick in the corner. Despite a fine take by Josh Glanville there was no repeat of the first period success as the Dons halted the drive and earned a scrummage. The final flourish came from Wimbledon as they countered from deep and a flyhack ended up in their grateful hands and replacement Tim Ridler scored try number six. Ed Morgan kept his 100% record with the boot to extend the lead to 42-5. Soon after the referee brought proceedings to a close. Wimbledon were excellent value for their deserved victory with periods of sustained power and pace. Additionally at the breakdown and in their tackling they were disruptive. Who knows why Sutton and Epsom so regularly begin a contest in a lacklustre fashion? Please send answers on a postcard to the Club Secretary. Then they transform into a team trading blows toe-to-toe with the opposition and play with great spirit and no little skill.

This result has propelled Wimbledon closer to the Promised Land of Promotion. For Sutton and Epsom, nails and coffins spring to mind but one must never give up hope and their followers should find solace in the story of Gilbert’s poteroo. Next Saturday they travel to Hampshire to take on Havant who currently lie second in the table.

**Sutton & Epsom**

Ciaran Mohr, Austin Bell, Sam Hurley, Lawrence Elliott, Ollie Baptiste-Wilson, Freddy Bunting, Ross Parsons, Tom Boaden, Alex Mount, Will Lloyd, George Drye ©, Josh Glanville, George London, Rob Hegarty & James Caddy.  
Replacements: (all used) Jack Howes, Chris Farrell & Alex Mawdsley.

**Wimbledon**

Ally Duddell, Ollie Kitto, Paul Hendry, Jack Reville, Max Lufkin, Ed Morgan, Rhys Morgan, Tom Boot, Jake Farnworth, Sam Gratton, Matt Grobler, Jack Cooke ©, Max Freeman, Connor Pearce & Zane Dillinger.  
Replacements: (all used) Bradley Ugodulunwa, Mark Scott & Tim Ridler.