

Camberley Bounce Back Against Spirited Sutton

5 February 2023



Sutton & Epsom RFC 26 – Camberley 50. Saturday 4th February. This fixture was scheduled for December but fell victim to the freezing weather. Camberley arrived smarting from a most unexpected defeat, only the second of their campaign, at the hands of lowly Bournemouth and were keen to return to winning ways. In contrast Sutton hoped to gain inspiration from the Chapel Gate upset and record a priceless win. After a wonderfully entertaining encounter with a dozen tries it was the visitors who claimed the victory, but not all the plaudits, with a 50-26 success.

Image courtesy Robin Kennedy

Liam Prescott kicked off towards the clubhouse for Camberley and S&E were soon awarded a penalty at the breakdown. Sutton had the first opportunity to open the scoring from the line out on the opposition 22. Rob Hegarty carried well and that began an onslaught on the opposition line. Probing runs from George Drye and Stefan Cooksammy saw the ball move from one side of the pitch to the other against sterling defence by their lofty opponents. Then, agonisingly, George Owen intercepted the ball 5 metres from his line and after some juggling secured the ball and sped away down the touchline to score the first of his hat trick of tries. Liam Prescott impressively slotted the conversion from touch for 7-0. Undeterred by the setback Sutton stormed back and the sidestepping Kyren Ghumra was stopped 5 metres short. The ball was quickly spun to the opposite flank for Ollie Baptiste-Wilson to score. Freddy Bunting levelled it for 7-7. It was a mightily impressive reply considering the deflating nature on the earlier score.

Sutton & Epsom had started impressively and had met Camberley's first sorties were met with resolute defence as both sides tried to assert themselves territorially with well-placed kicks. As the end of the first quarter approached the Watchetts XV kicked a penalty into the corner. Their lineout very efficient lineout catch and drive set up prop Adam Pickett for a try. Though Liam Prescott failed with the conversion they had regained the lead at 12-7. This score initiated 20 minutes of stunning rugby as Camberley produced the best passage of play seen at Rugby Lane this season or, indeed, on any of the Black & Whites' travels this campaign.

From another attacking line out the well-oiled machine churned out another try as Dom Sammut powered over. Liam Prescott added the extras for 19-7. If these two scores were functional and efficient the next four were far more thrilling in their execution. As if to prove they were not one trick ponies the next line out ball was spun wide to be to be touched down in the corner by George Owen. Liam Prescott converted from the touchline for 26-7 and the vital bonus point was secured. A clinical finish that was a mere hors d'oeuvres to the sumptuous feast that was to follow. Camberley won a scrum near halfway and went left and Liam Prescott put the runner into space as wonderfully angled running and passes were interchanged to see centre Alex Young score. Liam Prescott bisected the uprights for 33-7. Sutton cause was not aided as they lost Stefan Cooksammy to a dislocated shoulder. The emboldened visitors were in no mood for sympathy and were running the ball from everywhere. A 50-metre burst from their 22 down the left was then recycled and spun to the right as brisk well-timed passes saw try number six. Moments later try number seven was a replica of the previous one for 43-7. The timing of the passes, the pace and the unselfish play were breathtaking as Nick Barry scored and Alex Young collected his second try. The only surprise was that Liam Prescott's conversions had drifted wide. Sutton were dealt another injury blow when winger Kyren Ghumra withdrew injured. The rearranged back division saw Ross Parsons off the bench to 9, Austin Bell retreat to 15 and Lawrence Elliott slot in in the centres. Meanwhile Captain Chris Farrell was press-ganged into the backs. From adversity sprung hope as the half ended with prop Alex Mount crossing the whitewash and Freddy Bunting converting to make the score 43-14 at the break. It had been a half of fabulous rugby but the Rugby Lane crowd must have been a little bit concerned over their interval beverage how their emergency three-quarter unit would cope against the expected second half onslaught.

The contest resumed and Sutton put on a display of rare character and courage against their esteemed opponents and making light of adversity they threw themselves into attack in glorious style from the first whistle. Replacement prop Joe Reid was added to the mix and Sutton won a penalty from the scrum they had been awarded from the restart. Ross Parsons took it quickly and broke down field as excellent support play saw Josh Glanville score. Freddy Bunting made it 21-43 for a perfect start to the second half for the hosts. Both sides threw caution to the wind confident in their ability to add to their tally of tries. It was breathless stuff with S&E with limited possession not only resolute in defence but attacking with panache at every opportunity. The hosts secured a bonus point with their own catch and drive try that saw George Drye touch down which was a deserved reward for a superb display by the lock forward. The only blemish was a rare miss from Freddy Bunting as the Black & Whites now trailed 26-43.

Camberley attempted to reassert their scoreboard superiority but the Rugby Lane team was emboldened by their tries and were now formidable in defence. Ross Parsons and Chris Farrell in quick succession stopped the visitors near the line. S&E withstood a 5-metre catch and drive and turned the ball over on the line. The siege was lifted and Sutton returned to the front foot seeking another score. Indeed, it took until the final play of the game for the Black & White line to be breached. It needed a deft piece of skill by Liam Prescott to deflect the pass under pressure to George Owen who squeezed in at the corner to complete his hat trick. The redoubtable Prescott converted from touch and Mr Powdrell concluded proceedings with Camberley 50-26 winners. The visitors were excellent from 1 to 15, they not only had power and pace but clinical precision exploiting every overlap in a thrilling display of 15-man rugby. However, by keeping Camberley to a solitary second half try in the final moment was a measure of the quality, character and determination of S&E's performance in the second period. Making light of the mitigating circumstances of the injuries they again showed at Rugby Lane they are a XV that plays well above their lowly position in the table.

Next Saturday S&E host local rivals Wimbledon who are on the crest of a wave having won

every game this season following an opening day blip against Camberley. Having not being inconvenienced by the elements they sit on top of the table with the handsome advantage of points secured on the board. At Barham Road in the reverse fixture against S&E the Dons were 41-10 winners despite a very spirited display by the Black & Whites. The match will kick off at Rugby Lane at 2:30pm.

Sutton & Epsom

Lawrence Elliott, Ollie Baptiste-Wilson, Sam Hurley, Stefan Cooksammy, Kyren Ghumra, Freddy Bunting, Austin Bell, Alex Mount, Chris Farrell ©, Will Lloyd, George Drye, Josh Glanville, George London, Rob Hegarty & Tom Brooker.

Replacements: (all used) Joe Reid, Tom French & Ross Parsons.

Camberley

Victor Hardwicke, Max McCarthy, Alex Young, Jaid Wiltshire, George Owen, Liam Prescott, Alistair Walton, Adam Pickett, Michael Clarke, Nicholas Barry, Sam Voight, Dom Sammut, Ed Grosvenor, Chris Bird ©, Alex Hughes.

Replacements: (all used)

George Franzel, Josh Watson & Joseph Wood.

Sutton & Epsom Receive an Oxford Education

5 February 2023



Oxford Harlequins 67 – Sutton & Epsom 20. Saturday 28th January. Our local rugby team travelled to Oxfordshire to play the Oxford Harlequins. In the reverse fixture at Rugby Lane the crowd enjoyed a thrilling game that was in the balance until the final whistle. On that occasion the visiting Harlequins held on to win 22-19. A lot has happened since that afternoon as Sutton & Epsom are now staring relegation in the face whilst their hosts sit comfortably fifth in the table. There were to be no surprises or a much-needed upset for the Black & Whites as the hosts strolled to a 67-20 win.

Kyren Ghumra and Robbie Marty were unavailable for S&E and were replaced by Messrs Hurley & Baptiste-Wilson on the wings and George Drye returned to the second row. It was the first time that the Black & Whites had played at the Horspath Sports Ground but in contrast it was the 150th appearance in the league for James Caddy. Freddy Bunting kicked off and a couple of minutes later he was in a very similar location lining up a kick at goal. Once more his prodigious boot bisected the uprights from a considerable distance to give S&E a 3-0 lead. A minute later the hosts lost flanker John Ireland to an injury to be replaced by Ben Jenkins. Despite these early setbacks the Oxfordshire men were soon ahead on the scoreboard. From a 5-metre lineout hooker Joshua Archer scored and Ewan Fox added a finely struck conversion for 7-3.

Freddy Bunting kept Sutton within touching distance with another superb penalty cutting Sutton's deficit to a single point as they trailed 6-7. Then Tom Varndell made his first impact on proceedings making the initial break before the ball went to the opposite side and Ben Jenkins scored in the corner. Ewan Fox missed the conversion but was soon to make amends. Tom Varndell with a powerful run down the flank stayed in play enabling the ball to be spun open and this time Ewan Fox was the beneficiary with exquisite footwork he weaved his way over. The try scorer converted his score for a 19-6 lead at the end of the first quarter.

The Surrey team had an opportunity for a swift response. The Black & Whites not only failed to exploit their 5-metre line out but allowed the hosts to break from defence far too easily. On the half hour the Horspath crowd were applauding the bonus point try from winger Josiah Ratulaveta. Oxford Harlequins were disappearing over the horizon and were benefiting from poor tackling by the visitors as they led 24-6. S&E set about the task of getting a foothold in the game. With the interval approaching a tremendous catch and drive set up the visitors and Ollie Baptiste-Wilson was only denied by an offside player intercepting. The miscreant Varndell was shown a yellow card and S&E were awarded a penalty try for 13-24.

Sutton failed to take advantage of their numerical superiority. Firstly, James Caddy was shown a yellow for a high tackle and the game became 14-a-side. Secondly, Ewan Fox extended the host's lead with a penalty to make it 27-13. Soon after the referee concluded the half. It would take a considerable effort and a comeback reminiscent of the Rugby Lane encounter if the Black & Whites were going to get anything from their afternoon's endeavours.

If there were any doubts about the outcome of this fixture they were resolved in the opening five minutes of the second half. The hosts were in no mood to sit back on their laurels and coast home as they turned up the heat in search more tries. Try Number 5 came from a catch and drive from an impressive distance that saw Ben Jenkins collect his second try of the afternoon. Ewan Fox did the necessary for 34-13. Try Number 6 followed a couple of minutes later and it was a close-range effort courtesy of fine play by the pack with flanker Tom Walton getting the glory. With the extras added the score was 41-13 and the contest was over and it was only a question of how many the hosts would score.

The Black & Whites rallied and threw everything at the Harlequins perhaps in the belief that attack was the best form of defence. A quickly taken tap penalty by the returning Caddy and a 5-metre line out created a chance. Drye, Boaden and Hegarty went close before the ball was knocked on in the face of a resolute defence. As the game opened up with both sides eager to run the ball S&E were handicapped by the loss of their quicksilver 10 Jamie Flatley to an ankle injury. On the hour the hosts replaced Ewan Fox with Oliver Brian. Immediately his half-back partner, scrum half Harry Burn, was crossing the whitewash to give him his first shot at goal. Replacement Brian duly obliged for 48-13.

The crowd then were treated to the Tom Varndell Show. His first score was a classical run on the outside of his man demonstrating blistering pace considering his 37 years. The second came moments later and was the best of the afternoon. If the first was orthodox the second was stunning as his perfectly angled run against the grain saw him collect his second. Oliver Brian accepted one of his two offerings and it was suddenly 60-13. Sutton & Epsom responded with great heart. Replacement Ross Parsons poached the ball to make an opportunist break down the touchline but was unfortunately injured in the process. However, at last the visitors took

advantage of an advantageous field position. From the lineout George London drove back the defenders to be halted a metre shy but George Drye following up forced his way over the line to score. Freddy Bunting wasted no time in dropkicking the conversion for 60-20.

The game ended with Oxford Harlequins ninth and final try. They spun the ball wide and fullback Jonathan Hughes' arcing run saw him score. Oliver Brian added the conversion to conclude the scoring as the referee signalled the end of the game with the rampant Quins 67-20 victors. The result told the story. Oxford Harlequins were vastly superior on the day. Sutton & Epsom did not help their cause with a combination of weak tackling and errors when close to scoring. The Oxford Harlequins backs had impressed at Rugby Lane without Tom Varndell but with the formidable winger in their ranks they had more than enough firepower to overwhelm S&E. Next Saturday S&E host Camberley in the fixture re-arranged from 10 th December. The visitors will be smarting from a most surprising defeat at Bournemouth that has derailed their title hopes. Way back in September Sutton & Epsom lost at Watchetts Recreation Ground by 43-21. The promotion-chasing visitors will be looking to return to winning ways to keep up the pressure on the leaders, Wimbledon, and the match will kick off at Rugby Lane at 2:30pm.

Sutton & Epsom

Lawrence Elliott, Sam Hurley, Freddy Bunting, Alex Mawdsley, Ollie Baptiste-Wilson, Jamie Flatley, Austin Bell, Tom Boaden, Alex Mount, Will Lloyd, George Drye, Ewan McTaggart, Chris Farrell ©, Rob Hegarty & James Caddy.

Replacements: (all used) Dan Jones, George London & Ross Parsons.

Oxford Harlequins

Jonathan Hughes, Josaiah Ratulaveta, Edward Yeates, Toby Haines, Tom Varndell, Ewan Fox, Harry Burn, Bradley Cook, Joshua Archer, Joel Hopkins, Harvey Tricker, Allan Purchase, Tom Walton, John Ireland & George Primett.

Replacements: Jonathan Vermont, Ben Jenkins & Oliver Brian

Bassetts hound Sutton & Epsom

5 February 2023



Sutton & Epsom RFC 5 - Royal Wootton Bassett 26. 21st January. Sutton & Epsom had travelled to Wiltshire in October to take on the winless Royal Wootton Bassett and returned to Surrey with their tails between their legs having lost 31-29. So the return fixture at Rugby Lane saw the bottom two clubs, with only two wins each this season, desperately slugging it out to grasp a lifeline to stay in Regional 1 South Central. For both clubs every match is of critical importance in their fight to retain their status but the coaches, players and supporters would have eyed this fixture as one to win. At the full-time whistle it was RWB who were triumphant in the relegation battle winning 26-5.

Rugby Lane was bathed in sunshine on an afternoon where the hard ground had claimed half of the league fixtures that afternoon. S&E gave a debut to Alex Mawdsley in the centre and Lawrence Elliott and Jack Howes, who were replacements against London Welsh, started. Jamie Flatley's kick off was plucked from the sky by the S&E pack and Sutton were immediately on the attack. A penalty was kicked into the corner and Josh Glanville gathered the line out and was stopped a metre short. The forwards inched their way under the posts before it was spun wide to Robbie Martey to nip over in the corner. Though Freddy Bunting's conversion slid by it was an ideal start for the Black & Whites who led 5-0.

The Wiltshire All Blacks response was instantaneous. They matched S&E by regaining the restart and also winning a penalty with the only difference being they went for the quick tap. Scrambling defence denied the initial surge before the ball was delivered to the opposite touch where flanker Scott Parry crossed untouched. Rhys Floyd added the extras for the visitors to take a 7-5 lead. Royal Wootton Bassett pressed hard to extend their advantage and endured a series of near misses as they failed to exploit an overlap and were also held up over the line. It was one-way traffic and deservedly at the end of the first quarter flanker Ollie Baycroft scored for RWB. Rhys Floyd missed the conversion but his team were well worth their 12-5 lead.

Sutton were struggling to gain any fluency despite the upper hand in the set scrum and a fully functioning line out. The hosts' best opportunity to level the scores came on the half hour with some exquisite footwork from Jamie Flatley. The diminutive 10 jinked his way from halfway to five metres from the posts but his pass was knocked on under the pressure of the scrambling defence. For the remainder of the first half the Black & Whites were the architects of their own misfortune as they tried to attack from their own 22 and conceded possession. However, despite the visitors dominating territory and possession they had to be satisfied with the 12-5 interval score.

RWB opened the second period by kicking a penalty to the hosts' 5-metre line. Sutton stole the line out but an inadequate clearance was returned with menace only for the alert Kyren Ghumra to secure the loose ball. The Black & Whites were struggling to find any sustained pressure as their opponents continued to search for a third try. The Wiltshire 10 entered flamboyant mode. First Rhys Floyd chipped over the top and re-gathered the ball in the 22 but was enveloped by the cover. Then a cross-field kick was added to his expanding repertoire. With Wiltshire winger favourite to score a cruel bounce denied the visitors.

Sutton & Epsom were clinging on by their fingernails but 15 minutes into the second period the pressure finally told. A sweeping attack was halted 10 metres short but a perfectly timed and angled run from the outstanding Number 8 Gavin Ougan saw him score. Rhys Floyd impressively

converted from the flank for a 19-5 score-line. At this stage the Sutton resistance was being led by bullocking runs from Stefan Cooksammy who had replaced an injured Robbie Martey in the first period but there was very little fluency in the S&E game. Then at the start of the final quarter the Black & Whites arose from their slumber. Their best play saw Kyren Ghumra denied in the corner by a fine cover tackle. Then from a 22-metre line out the Surrey men attacked the left hand corner before switching to the wide-open spaces on the right. A try looked a certainty before an unforgiving pass left a brace of backs staring at the undefended line.

With the chance for a grandstand finish and memorable comeback fading by the minute it was Gavin Ougan that steadied the nerves of the Wiltshire All Blacks. Whether picking the ball up from the base of the scrum or receiving the ball in open play he rampaged forward clocking up the yardage to put Sutton on the back foot. With ten minutes left remaining RWB secured their fourth try and the bonus point that their superiority on the day warranted. Attacking from a line out on the S&E 22 they won a penalty 5 metres from the line. A couple of phases later winger Jamie Murray was over in the corner. Rhys Floyd made light of the angle to bisect the uprights for 26-5. The hosts were left playing for pride as they sought out a consolation score or two. A beautifully weighted kick from Jamie Flatley from 40 metres initiated a curious moment. The RWB cover gathered the ball near his line and passed it to an S&E player who immediately passed it to back to another RWB man, it was becoming one of those afternoons for Sutton. From a 5-metre scrum the retreating Wiltshire pack conceded a penalty. The Black & Whites spread themselves wide and from the tap penalty were held up over the line. The hosts returned the drop out from under the posts and nearly scored in one corner before switching directions. Jamie Flatley was in a promising position threatening a score but lost his footing and a grateful defence swallowed him up. The referee then ended the contest with Royal Wootton Bassett victors to the tune of 26-5.

With this result for Sutton the thought of relegation has shifted from possibility to probability with this crucial defeat to the side that sit at the foot of the table. In contrast RWB will be not studying the '3 Rs' but the '4 Bs' as they have fixtures against Bracknell, Banbury, Brighton and Bournemouth as the plot their route to survival. The visitors thoroughly warranted their success and will hope to maintain their momentum they have gained since the prolonged festive break. In contrast the Black & Whites remaining fixtures are predominantly against those teams in the upper echelons.

Next Saturday S&E will be visiting new territory when travelling to Horspath to play against the Oxford Harlequins. In the reverse fixture the Rugby Lane crowd saw a thrilling contest that the Oxfordshire side edged by 22-19.

Sutton & Epsom

Lawrence Elliott, Robbie Martey, Freddy Bunting, Alex Mawdsley, Kyren Ghumra, Jamie Flatley, Austin Bell, Tom Boaden, Jack Howes, Will Lloyd, Josh Glanville, Ewan McTaggart, Chris Farrell ©, Rob Hegarty & James Caddy.

Replacements: (all used) Alex Mount, Stefan Cooksammy & Ross Parsons.

Royal Wootton Bassett

Daniel Hale, Matthew Huggins, Scott Douglas, Connor Tomley, Jamie Murray, Rhys Floyd, Rhys Higginson, Ben Wilkinson, Scott Parry, Christopher Roshier, Jack Daynes, Josh McCafferty, Ollie Baycroft, Dylan Higginson, Gavin Ougan ©.

Replacements: (all used) Jamie Davison, Sam Williams & Sean Marsden.

Fine struggle to keep off league floor

5 February 2023



London Welsh 42 - Sutton & Epsom RFC 27 - Saturday 14th January. When these two sides met at Rugby Lane in October they produced an engrossing affair that ended honours even 15-15. Sutton and Epsom arrived at the famous Old Deer Park ground looking to build on the previous Saturday's win against Bournemouth as they attempt to fight their way out of the relegation zone. The Exiles fielded a much-changed team from the earlier encounter and were able this time to field the formidable trio of Couzens, Bodinham and Cowdy.

After a feast of running rugby and eight tries London Welsh prevailed 42-27. Fortunately the torrential midday rain abated in time for the kick off. Sutton had only two changes in their starting XV as they welcomed back Ross Parsons and James Caddy. London Welsh kicked off and the hosts started at full throttle forcing their way into the visitors' 22. They opened their account via the boot of Dafydd Manley for a 3-0 lead.

After one-way traffic for the opening ten minutes the Surrey men were awarded a penalty on their first incursion into the Welsh half. Though the kick was near halfway Freddy Bunting strode up and thumped over what was to be the first of his five penalties of the afternoon to level the score, 3-3. Parity did not last long. The marauding Number 8 Ben Davies passed to the towering Ed Couzens and Rhys Howells was on hand to add the finishing touches for the first try. Dafydd Manley's conversion failed but London Welsh led 8-3 after fifteen minutes.

Sutton had enjoyed limited possession and precious little time in their opponent's territory but took the lead in stunning style. After good work by the forwards Jamie Flatley was presented with the ball and with quicksilver footwork left the defence clutching at thin air to scamper in under the posts. Freddy Bunting did the necessary and Sutton and Epsom led by 10-8 at the end of the first quarter.

London Welsh did not trail for long. Scrum half Adam Nixon darted down the blindside to release Sion Cowdy whose perfectly timed pass put in Jacob Butler to restore the ODP team's lead as Dafydd Manley added the extras for 15-10. Another Freddy Bunting penalty reduced Sutton's deficit to 13-15. But minutes later it was the hosts who were awarded a penalty but they opted to kick it into the corner for the attacking line out. The pack controlled the ball and ushered captain James Buncle over the line for his first try this campaign. Dafydd Manley failed to add to the scoreboard as the Welsh led 20-13. Sutton and Epsom were still very much in the contest and with the prodigious Bunting adding another penalty with half time rapidly approaching the visitors were trailing 16-20.

The gloss was rubbed off Sutton and Epsom's first period performance when scrum half Adam Nixon finished off an attack he initiated with a quick tap penalty.

When Dafydd Manley's conversion sailed between the posts Mr Michael Essam blew his whistle to end the first half with London Welsh 27-16 to the good. The Black & Whites started the second period well playing at a high tempo with excellent work from the forwards to set up camp in the host's 22. Despite the control and pressure they were only able to add another Bunting penalty to trail 19-27. In their first sortie to the Sutton 22 the ODP team consoled themselves with a Dafydd Manley penalty for 30-19. Despite this score it was the visitors who were now in the ascendancy. The Sutton and Epsom pack hammered the Welsh defences with power and control as Ewan McTaggart advanced to the line.

The red wall held firm and hooker Gareth Lewis stole the ball to relieve the siege. After such a superb defensive effort London Welsh offered a lifeline to the visitors as Ben Bodinham received a yellow card. Sutton and Epsom and Epsom replacement Lawrence Elliott made an immediate impact with a surging break as Sutton and Epsom pressed hard to make their numerical superiority pay.

The visitors were playing their best rugby of the game but had to content themselves with another Freddy Bunting penalty. Trailing 22-30 with 15 minutes to go and a man up Sutton and Epsom were very much back in the contest. Hope springs eternal but misery can deflate spectators in seconds. From the restart Sutton and Epsom knocked on and from the scrum Tom Brooker was shown a yellow card and the game continued as a 14-man contest.

To compound the problems for Sutton and Epsom the Exile's Number 8 Ben Davies burrowed his way over from close-range to extend London Welsh's lead to 35-22 with ten minutes remaining. Sutton had to get the next try but that honour went to the hosts and it was the best of their six. Sion Cowdy strode forward from halfway, chipped ahead and won the foot race as he regathered the ball he passed to supporting full back Tom Hunt who scored. Dafydd Manley added the conversion to make it 42-22 and end all hopes of a Sutton success.

Sutton and Epsom refused to retire meekly in the gathering gloom as the game entered time added on. Tom Brooker returned to the contest and made an instant impact as the Rugby Lane men went in search of a consolation. After pressure from the tireless pack had drawn the Welsh defences to their posts the ball was spun wide and a long ball floated pass reached Tom Brooker on the wing and he scored in the corner. That was the final score in a thoroughly entertaining contest with London Welsh earning a bonus point for a 42-27 victory. London Welsh scrum half Adam Nixon won the Devil's Bridge Rum Man of the Match and he had been at the heart of the action throughout. London Welsh were worthy winners as they created more chances and secured six tries.

The kicking of Freddy Bunting kept Sutton and Epsom in the contest and if they had been more clinical they may have gained a bonus point or two. Sutton and Epsom certainly matched the hosts for phases of the match and played some exhilarating rugby but the try on the stroke of half time and the yellow card were critical blows from which they did not recover. Next Saturday sees the basement battle as Rugby Lane plays host to the Wiltshire All Blacks, Royal Wootton Bassett, who earned a very creditable bonus point at home against Havant as Sutton and Epsom toiled at ODP. Further afield Banbury's 17-17 draw at Brighton was another result that was not welcome for the Black & Whites.

When Sutton & Epsom ventured to Ballards Ash earlier in the campaign they lost by the narrow margin of 31-29 as RWB celebrated their first win of the season. Sutton will need to turn the tables on Saturday and will hope a large and vocal crowd will gather at Rugby Lane for the 2pm start to cheer on the Black & Whites.

Sutton & Epsom: Sam Hurley, Robbie Martey, Freddy Bunting, Jamie See, Kyren Ghumra, Jamie Flatley, Ross Parsons, Tom Boaden, Alex Mount, Will Lloyd, James Caddy, Josh Glanville, Chris Farrell ©, Rob Hegarty & Tom Brooker. Replacements: (all used) Jack Howes, Ewan McTaggart & Lawrence Elliott.

London Welsh: Tom Hunt, Sion Cowdy, Rhys Howells, Dafydd Manley, Osian McAvoy, Adam Nixon, James Buncle ©, Gareth Lewis, Sam Johnson, Ed Couzens, Ben Bodinham, Charlie Bramble, Rohan Pixley & Ben Davies. Replacements: (all used) Myles Keane, James Downing & Elis Staines.

Go to <https://www.suttonrugby.co.uk> for future fixtures.

Sutton & Epsom RFC Hold On For A Vital Victory

5 February 2023



Sutton & Epsom 13 - Bournemouth 8. 7th January. The combination of seasonally inclement winter weather and the Yuletide celebrations created a 5-week lay off from all league rugby for the Sutton & Epsom Rugby squad. This welcome respite from the ravages of an underwhelming campaign does have the proviso that the S&E is now forced to play on ten consecutive Saturdays to complete their fixture list. The Black & Whites gained revenge on Bournemouth, who had narrowly defeated them 28-25 at Chapel Gate in October, with a hard fought 13-8 success. Sutton & Epsom gave a debut to Jamie Flatley at 10 and Kieran Finney, back from university, made his first start of the season to become representative Number 44 for S&E this campaign.

There was also a welcome return to the colours from Messrs Bunting and Martey. The miserable weather was probably appropriate for two teams at the wrong end of the table who were desperately slugging it out for a victory. Bournemouth kicked off and Sutton had the advantage of a sporadic wind. The visitors dominated the opening exchanges and encamped in the S&E 22. A sweeping move to the left hand corner saw the hosts scrambling in defence and despite Kyren Ghumra's tackle Ryan Morrell was on hand to score. Grant Hancox's conversion from the flank slid wide but the Lions led 5-0 after an impressive opening ten minutes. From the restart Sutton were awarded a penalty and had an opportunity to open their account. Freddy Bunting thumped over the penalty and Sutton trailed by 3-5. Moments later the returning centre was addressing a more challenging kick from 45 metres but despite his best endeavours he failed to bisect the uprights.

In the opening quarter it appeared that the Bunting boot was the only Sutton & Epsom currency as they had enjoyed precious little possession. Then a startling break by Jamie Flatley had the crowd on their feet as they enjoyed S&E's best passage of play. Five minutes later Number 8 Tom Brooker intercepted a wayward pass on halfway, leaving all the chasers in his wake he strode home to score. Freddy Bunting chipped over the conversion and the Rugby Lane team led 10-5. Despite the scoreboard the men from Chapel Gate were enjoying the majority of the territory and possession. They made light of the slippery conditions and spun the ball wide at every opportunity in an effort to replicate their earlier success. The Sutton & Epsom defence was dogged and organised and the visitors were denied any further opportunity to add to their account in the first period. Indeed it was S&E who extended their lead on the half hour via the good offices of Freddy Bunting who added another penalty for 13-5.

For the remainder of the half the Surrey men grew in confidence and began to enjoy more possession. Centre Antony Fitch, with no malicious intent, received a harsh yellow card for a high tackle on Robbie Martey and the visitors were reduced to 14 men. Moments later the referee brought proceedings to a halt with Sutton 13-5 ahead at the interval. Sutton started the second half superbly as they tried to take advantage of their numerical superiority. A powerful scrum sent their opponents into reverse and won a penalty. From the line out Tom Brooker carried powerfully to the line.

Numerous phases and carries continued to inch the ball towards the posts. Just when a try appeared to be inevitable a thunderous Bournemouth tackle dislodged the ball and the visitors were awarded a scrum. Their sterling defence was rewarded as they cleared their lines and they returned to their full compliment with Sutton having failed to score a single point against the 14 men. On the hour came a moment of great controversy. Jamie See threaded a wonderful kick behind the Bournemouth defence that came to rest a couple of yards from the line. Robbie Martey raced forward and intelligently slid in to gather the ball and the cover defence instinctively dived on the winger on the deck. Robbie Martey regained his footing and scored. However, the referee awarded a penalty to Bournemouth.

The visitors refreshed their pack with their bench and the fresh legs made a significant impact in the final quarter. It was the Lions pack who now had the ascendancy at the set scrum and from that sturdy foundation they set about reducing the deficit. The relentless pressure was rewarded with a penalty on the Sutton 22 with ten minutes remaining. Sensibly Grant Hancox stepped up to knock over the kick to make it 13-8 and put Bournemouth within a score. The closing stages of the match were to be anything but a relaxing affair for the Sutton faithful. In time added on the Black & Whites were showing commendable game management as the forwards kept the ball at close quarters. Then disaster struck as an isolated forward conceded a penalty. It was kicked to the corner and the Dorset men had a 5-metre line out. The visitors were repelled but the hosts conceded another penalty. After a lengthy discussion they opted for the tap penalty.

Their followed a relentlessly slow advance towards the Sutton & Epsom posts. Inch by inch the Bournemouth pack moved towards glory and an inevitable try. It

was all hands to the pump for the Black & Whites as they threw themselves desperately into every tackle and veteran centre Jamie See stole the ball. A jubilant Sutton player kicked the ball towards the 2 nd XV pitch and the referee blew his whistle to conclude the afternoon's entertainment. Victory by 13-8 was essential for S&E if they were to entertain hopes of survival.

The Black & Whites will hope the nature of this victory will create the necessary confidence and momentum to ignite their campaign. Jamie Flatley made an impressive debut at 10 playing with an assured quality and demonstrating dazzling footwork that bodes well for the future. The Sutton & Epsom pack was outstanding on an afternoon made for attritional rugby. Bournemouth matched Sutton & Epsom blow for blow and could have taken the honours at the death in a contest both sides needed to win and the visitors failed by the narrowest of margins.

Next Saturday, with sincere apologies to the rest of Sutton & Epsom's esteemed opponents, is a red-letter day as the club travels to the famous Old Deer Park to play the prestigious London Welsh. It will be the third time Sutton & Epsom have visited the Exiles and this will be the third location enjoyed but the first time in 120 years that they have had the privilege. In October the two teams fought to a standstill beneath a splendid rainbow and it was honours even with a 15-15 draw that was highly entertaining.

Sutton & Epsom

Sam Hurley, Robbie Martey, Freddy Bunting, Jamie See, Kyren Ghumra, Jamie Flatley, Austin Bell, Tom Boaden, Alex Mount, Will Lloyd, George Drye, Josh Glanville, Chris Farrell©, Rob Hegarty & Tom Brooker.

Replacements: Kieran Finney. Not Used: Jack Howes, & Ciaran Mohr.

Bournemouth

Ryan Morrell, Ash Taylor, Adam Higgins, Antony Fitch, Oli Granger-Williams, Ben Meaden, Grant Hancox, Alan Manning Conrad Carkeet, Gianluca Firetto, Matt Warwick, Connor McCaffrey, Ben Kimber, Ciaran Smyth & Joe Desmond.

Replacements: (all used) Jordie Wayman, Tom Napier & Ben Goodall.

Kinsella Hat trick The Highlight

5 February 2023



Sutton & Epsom RFC Women 39 - Medway Women 7 - Saturday 3rd December - The Sutton & Epsom Women's XV have enjoyed much success in recent years. The impressive performances have continued this season in Championship South East 2 in the third tier of the rugby pyramid. They started the day in second place in the table snapping at the heels of Battersea Ironsides. The Black & Whites were unbeaten at home whilst their opponents, Medway, in contrast had only recorded two wins this season. The match went according to form with Sutton winning in style by 39-7.

On a cold afternoon under lights at Rugby Lane Medway kicked off with S&E playing towards the Cabbage Page. The hosts went in search of the opening score to stamp their authority on proceedings. Stern defence and S&E errors thwarted the early promising opportunities. After 10 minutes a huge clearance by Jayne Meadows was complimented by a superb kick-chase. Sutton turned over the ball and Jayne Meadows glided threw a gap and sauntered home to open the scoring. Though the experienced fly half failed to convert her own try the hosts were leading 5-0. The next try was a sensational solo score by Aegean Leech that demonstrated all the qualities required for a top class back. With great vision she cut back inside, running with balance and speed she evaded numerous tacklers to score. Jayne Meadows added the extras for a 12-0 lead.

As the first quarter was ending Jayne Meadows sublime cross-field kick had the defence scrambling and the ravenous Sutton chasers forced the turnover. The initial opportunity was wasted but this was just a temporary stay of execution. A burst from Jo Evans broke the line and Rachel Kinsella, left with plenty to do, finished superbly in the corner despite a thunderous covering tackle. The touchline conversion fell short as the Surrey women stretched their lead to 17-0. The visitors stormed back with a surging run from full back Katie Young. Encouraged by this the forwards took over and pressed hard to open the Medway account. Prop Hannah Lee powered her way over from close-range for a well-deserved try. Jemma Thrupp's sweetly struck conversion bisected the uprights to reduce the deficit to 7-17.

As the interval approached winger Lucy Hoad was only denied a try by a fine cover tackle. The ball was swung back to the opposite side of the pitch and Jo Evans perfect pass put away by Rachel Kinsella for her second try of the afternoon. Jo Evans, taking over the kicking duties, failed to add to the 22-7 score. However, Sutton had suffered a significant loss in personnel as Jayne Meadows was forced to retire with a hamstring injury. The fly half had oozed class all game, orchestrating the attack with prodigious territorial kicking, thoughtful distribution and the opening try. S&E reshuffled the deck as Jo Evans moved up from 15 to 10 and replacement Abby Wynne slotted in at full back. In the dying moments of the first period Lucy Hoad was again thwarted by a tremendous tackle and soon after the referee blew for half time with Sutton & Epsom leading 22-7.

Medway needed to score early in the second period to try to turn the tide. They responded with great spirit and were soon pressing on the Sutton line. The Black & White defence was up to the challenge and having cleared the danger introduced Emily Grainger and Isabelle Keith off the bench to replace Rachel Balcombe and Natalie McCall. The Priestfields outfit were enjoying their best passage of play as they encamped in the host's half but try as they might they could not add to their score. Indeed it was the Rugby Lane team that were next to cross the whitewash. A dominant scrummage provided the platform to spin it wide. Rachel Kinsella was denied her third score but was able to offload to Aegean Leech for the easiest of tries. Jo Evans added the conversion for a 29-7 lead.

The game entered the final quarter with the team from Rochester determined to add to their solitary try whilst Sutton hoped to exploit any gaps that might appear. The game swung from end to end as a try-saving tackle Abby Wynne denied a deserved score for the visitors. Moments later Rachel Kinsella was again thwarted by Katie Youngs' tackle.

Perhaps it was fitting that the best team try of the afternoon concluded with Rachel Kinsella completing her hat trick. A clean line out ball was advanced by the forwards, the ball was released to the backs and a perfect pass by Aegean Leech was gathered by the flying winger who finished with aplomb. Sutton & Epsom missed the conversion but had stretched their lead to 34-7. Perhaps the frustration of being denied the additional score that their efforts warranted led to a bit of frustration in the Medway ranks. The Kent team conceded a penalty and one of their number was deemed too loquacious for the referee's tastes and they were marched back an additional 10 metres. With five minutes left of the clock the hosts added a seventh and final try. It was the turn of replacement Abby Wynne to demonstrate agile footwork to weave her way to the line to make it 39-7. Though there were no additional scores the visitors showed great spirit in trying to add to their account.

Nobody watching would have begrudged them a try as their second half performance and effort deserved more than they got. The referee blew the final whistle and Sutton & Epsom had maintained the pressure on the Battersea Ironsides who also had an impressive win at Canterbury, 36-15.

The Black & Whites thoroughly deserved their win. It was an excellent performance from all of the squad. The front row triumvirate of Jones, Forsyth and Styan maintained the solid platform from the scrummage. The back five provided a constant stream of quick ball for the back division. Sutton have considerable pace in the three-quarters with Zoe Smith spreading it wide to the creative hub in the centres Olivia Lambe and Aegean Leech. Wingers Rachel Kinsella and Lucy Hoad got the ball with time and space and on this occasion it was the former who took the glory with a tremendous trio of tries. In addition Jo Evans coming into the line from full back is another potent weapon. Medway fought hard to the bitter end and were competitive from the first to the last minute with the pack providing territory and possession but they could not convert pressure into points.

Sutton & Epsom

Jo Evans, Lucy Hoad, Aegean Leech, Olivia Lambe, Rachel Kinsella, Jayne Meadows, Zoe Smith, Tia Jones, Harriet Forsyth, Caroline Styan, Alex Parker, Rachel Balcombe, Alice Clarke, Bernadette Rees & Natalie McCall.

Replacements: (all used) Emily Grainger, Isabelle Keith & Abby Wynne.

Medway

Katie Young, Marisa Gould, Alisha Coulson, Naomi Quinn, Aimee Haslam, Jemma Thrupp,
Emily Stalley, Hannah Lee, Zoe Gardiner, Gemma Duncan, Alex Davis, Caroline Jordan,
Anna Saunders, Chloe Sedge & Corinna Griffiths.

Replacements

Michelle Darby, Ann Robertson & Ellie Warren.

Sutton and Epsom RFC denied at the death

5 February 2023



BANBURY 12 SUTTON & EPSOM RFC 12 – Saturday 3rd December – saw the start of the reverse fixtures and for both clubs, who are struggling at the bottom of the table, it was a vital encounter. The occasion was shrouded in sadness for Sutton due to the most unexpected and tragic passing of their President during the week. Robert Knight was a magnificent ambassador for the club, an ever-present supporter not only at home but also away and, above all else, a wonderful man and excellent friend to all who knew him. He will be much missed.

The hard fought contest, before a large crowd swelled by the Christmas lunch and the importance of the match, ended honours even, 12-12. S&E gave a debut to Lawrence Elliott at 15 and Brad Meeson had his first outing this campaign since his recent nuptials. On a cold but sunny afternoon on a heavy pitch Jamie See set the game in motion following the minute's silence. The hosts included in their ranks Soane Tonga'uaha, the 40 year-old former Tongan and Northampton prop, who made a predictable impact in the set scrum. With the Black & White pack shunted into reverse and conceding a penalty the early advantage was with the hosts. Indeed they opened the scoring after 10 minutes with an impressive catch and drive as prop James Leonardi was ushered over the line. Scrum half Ed Phillips missed the conversion but Banbury led 5-0.

Sutton and Epsom's riposte was immediate as they stormed into the Oxfordshire team's 22. The ball was spun wide and Angus Findlay passed to Brad Meeson who tried to squeeze in at the corner. The despair was short-lived as the whistle blew and the referee brought it back for an earlier penalty for the visitors. Sadly, Sam Hurley slipped on his approach and the penalty struck the upright. Kyren Ghumra, whose arrival had been hindered by car troubles, was brought onto the wing to replace Angus Findlay. The Black & Whites, with Rob Hegarty and George Drye carrying with great effect, pressed hard to get on the scoreboard.

Another back move concluded with debutant Elliott's grubber rolling into touch by the try-line flag. Though the Bulls cleared their lines Sutton's next attack was successful. A line break by George Drye followed by a floated pass found Brad Meeson who scored in the corner. Sam Hurley's immaculate touchline conversion meant S&E now enjoyed a narrow 7-5 lead. The Bulls went for an immediate response and it came through their sizeable pack and another line out.

As the home crowd urged their pack ever onwards from halfway they were awarded a penalty. The ball went wide and twice Ben Tame's thunderous tackles stopped the hosts. The half ended with S&E in the ascendancy as Kyren Ghumra was twice close to glory. The first time an inside pass from scrum half Austin Bell was adjudged to be forward as the winger was homing in on a try. The second was the final play of the first period as the ball went down the line the last pass went awry and ended in touch rather than being touched down.

The referee concluded the first half with the visitors enjoying a slender 7-5 advantage. The game continued with an instant reminder of the powerful pack of the hosts. Driving Sutton off their own put in on the S&E's 22 they unwisely opted for the boot and did not benefit from the advantageous position. In contrast Sutton threw away three points when under the posts and 5 metres from the Banbury line. The Black & Whites were awarded a penalty that was reversed for an off-the-ball infringement after the whistle.

The Bulls came close to rubbing salt into the wound with an interception but the referee called play back denying an almost certain try. As the heavy home pack tired on the claggy surface space began to appear that S&E looked to exploit. The half back combination of Bell and See both enjoyed a couple of stunning breaks. It was from one of scrum half Bell's bursts that evergreen Sam Hurley broke into the 22. Will Lloyd exploited the blind side and supplied a perfectly timed pass for James Caddy who finished with style with his expertly angled run to the line. Though the conversion drifted wide Sutton led 12-5 with 15 minutes to play.

The visitors pressed for another score to create a cushion that would mean Banbury would need to score twice. Jamie See's burst with the supporting James Caddy put the Black & Whites in prime position. But all came to nought after winning their scrum ball and a couple of phases from the forwards they lost control of the ball with the line at their mercy. Then the Bulls were given a lifeline with a penalty near halfway. A superb kick spiralled towards the corner but Lady Luck smiled upon the visitors as it crossed the touchline in the in-goal area resulting in a 22 drop out. However, the Oxfordshire men soon had their hands on the ball once more and forced a line out 20 metres from the try-line.

Another perfect catch and controlled drive saw the Bodicote boys roll relentlessly ever onwards. The forwards were stopped on the line but in an instant James Miller was presented with the ball and he supplied the finishing touches. Ed Phillips held his nerve to add the extras to level the score at 12-12 as the game entered time added on.

There was enough time for a few anxious moments but it ended honours even. A result that neither side wanted but one that favoured the hosts as S&E stayed in the bottom two. Banbury enjoyed a significant advantage at the set scrum for a substantial period of the game and their two tries came from formidable forward work with catch and drives.

On reflection one might have expected them to have carved out more opportunities to have added to their account. Despite struggling for a solid platform to attack, Sutton & Epsom created enough chances to have won the game but faltered at the crucial moments. For the visitors the back row trio of Tame, Hegarty and Caddy were superb. Austin Bell had arguably his best game at 9 whilst Jamie See rolled back the years with his breaks from 10 and with a promising debut from Lawrence Elliott there were many positives for S&E if not enough points taken from this encounter.

The action returns to Rugby Lane next Saturday when Sutton & Epsom host Camberley RFC for the first time since September 2012. When the clubs met in September this year at Watchetts Recreation Ground the hosts won 43-21 with Josua Lewan scoring a first half hat trick. The visitors will be keen for a repeat as they are in second place in the table in hot pursuit of leaders Wimbledon. The match kicks off at 2pm.

Sutton & Epsom: Lawrence Elliott, Angus Findlay, Stefan Cooksammy, Brad Meeson, Sam Hurley, Jamie See, Austin Bell, Tom Boaden, Chris Farrell, Will Lloyd, George Drye, Josh Glanville, Ben Tame, Rob Hegarty & James Caddy. Replacements: (all used) George London, Jack Howes & Kyren Ghumra.:

Banbury: Thomas Gray, Alex Garbett, Quinten Blythe, Matt Goode, Jack Anderson, James Miller, Ed Phillips, James Leonardi, Ian Isham, Soane Tonga'uaha, Louis Tooth, Jacob Turner, James Hibbert, George Ding, Callum Horne. Replacements: (all used) Peter Boulton, Alex Nicholls and Dan Kirwin.

Mighty Maids Run Riot

5 February 2023



MAIDENHEAD 61 – SUTTON & EPSOM 24 – Saturday 26th November. Maidenhead started this season with four extremely impressive wins as they surged to the top of the table by the end of September. That was followed by five defeats before they returned to winning ways in the last round against Bournemouth. In stark contrast S&E have only one win and multiple close defeats in the opening ten encounters. The Berkshire club ran in nine tries in a thumping 61-24 triumph that reaffirmed the league standings of the two clubs.

On a chill and overcast afternoon Maidenhead kicked off. It only took a couple of minutes for the hosts to open their account. Pouncing on a sliced clearance they besieged the Sutton & Epsom line before hooker Dan Hostetler forced his way over the line. Greg Smith added the extras. Hardly had anyone had time to digest the early score when Harry Wells made a surging break from the restart and gifted a try to his centre partner Niall Crosley. Greg Smith added the conversion for 14-0. Sutton’s pain in the first five minutes increased as they saw fly half Gareth O’Brien departing with an injured ankle. Jamie See went to 10 and Angus Findlay came off the bench for his league debut.

Maidenhead gave the visitors no time to settle and crossed the whitewash for their third try from Number 8 Will Macaulay. Greg Smith added two more points to his tally for 21-0 after only ten pulsating minutes. Sutton hit back as Seb Priest’s sublime grubber into the corner set up a 5-metre line out. The pack ushered Matt Harwood over the line from his preferred distance. Sam Hurley added the conversion and the lead was cut to 21-7.

The second quarter may not have provided as many points but was still full of action. S&E lost hooker Alex Mount to injury on the half hour to be replaced by Jack Howes. Both teams squandered chances to add to their score as the first period entered time added on.

The Braywick Park team reasserted their authority with two more tries. Firstly, good carries by the pack culminated in a deft pass from a prop that found winger Scott Prince in space to finish it off. Not to be upstaged fellow winger Alex Turton scored a wonderful solo score from 60 metres to make it five tries. The metronomic Greg Smith bisected the uprights on both occasions as the first half concluded with Maidenhead comfortably placed at 25-7.

The second period began with a brutal reminder of who was in charge. A strong carry by flanker Ed Atkins set up Niall Crosley for a stunning break deep into the Sutton & Epsom half before setting up fullback Jamie Maddern for the try. Greg Smith chipped over the conversion for 42-7. Then Harry Wells was given a yellow card for a breakdown infringement. Sutton & Epsom certainly made their numerical advantage pay as they quickly scored from another disciplined effort from the pack from a 5-metre line out with captain Chris Farrell taking the plaudits. The conversion went awry as S&E trailed 12-42. The Black & Whites were the next to touch down courtesy of a remarkable line out that rumbled 40 metres down the paddock. The ball was finally released and Austin Bell put Seb Priest in at the corner. Sam Hurley converted from the flank for 19-42.

Restored to their full compliment the Berkshire team regained their scoring mojo as a dummy from James Maddern flummoxed the Surrey defences and flanker Jack Norris finished off with a 20-metre burst to the line. Greg Smith perfect afternoon with the boot ended with his only missed conversion with Maidenhead 47-19 to the good. A couple of minutes later it was more stunning play from the brilliant Berkshire backs as replacement Charlie Scott delayed his pass to perfection to put in the returning Harry Wells. Normal service resumed from the boot of Greg Smith to extend the lead to 54-19. Scott Prince raced in for his second and Maidenhead’s ninth, and final, try. Greg Smith was on target again to record his sixteenth point as he stretched the lead to 61-19.

The Rugby Lane men gained some small consolation on a chastening afternoon when they secured a bonus point when they scored a fourth try. Once more it was the forwards, and again a catch and drive from a line out. On this occasion it was replacement Rob Hegarty burrowing his way to glory. Maidenhead’s Charlie Scott became the latest victim of the harsh sentence meted out to anyone found guilty of knocking on an attempted interception. With Maidenhead reduced to 14 and Sutton already with the bonus point the game petered out in the last ten minutes in stark contrast to the seismic opening exchanges. The Magenta men celebrated their well-deserved victory as the final whistle blew to conclude proceedings.

The host’s victory was based on the power, pace and precision of their first class back division. Having gained the initiative with three early strikes Maidenhead never looked likely to be overhauled. The Sutton cause was not helped by key early injuries to not only their fly half but also their hooker. The home pack had a much harder afternoon. Indeed, the Black & Whites were entirely indebted to their forwards for their bonus point with four tries of similar style based around their improving line out.

The homeward stretch of the league season starts next Saturday, 3rd December, with the first of the reverse fixtures against Banbury. Back in September Sutton were forced to play at the neutral venue of Cobham RFC and the Oxfordshire club narrowly won a hard fought encounter by 26-22. If S&E felt downcast on Saturday when the referee brought the game to a close one can only imagine the emotions in the Banbury dressing room as they were thrashed 102-22 by league leaders Wimbledon. Both sides will be keen for redemption when they meet at Bodicote Park as Sutton & Epsom visit another new league venue this campaign.

Sutton & Epsom

Michael Davies, Sam Hurley, Freddie Bunting, Jamie See, Sebastian Priest, Gareth O’Brien, Austin Bell, Tom Boaden, Alex Mount, Will Lloyd, Josh Glanville, Matt Harwood, Ben Tame, Chris Farrell © & James Caddy.
Replacements (all used): Jack Howes, Rob Hegarty & Angus Findlay.

Maidenhead

Jamie Maddern, Scott Prince, Harry Wells, Niall Crossley, Alex Turton, Greg Smith, Archie Dunnill, Elio Mandozzi, Dan Hostetler, Elliott Beattie, Phillip Wells, Brook Harvey-Smith, Ed Atkins, Jack Norris & Will Macaulay.
Replacements: Mike Guida, Levi Meek and Charlie Scott.

Havant Heartbreak For Battling Black & Whites

5 February 2023



SUTTON & EPSOM 27 – HAVANT 30. Saturday 12th November – saw the visit of a familiar foe in Havant. Last season the Hampshire club did the double over the Surrey side. A cursory glance at the league table prior to the kick off would have suggested a continuance of this recent trend. By the final whistle this close fought match evoked memories of the two classic encounters of the 2013-4 campaign as the visitors returned home to Hooks Lane with a narrow 30-27 win but the hosts won many plaudits for their determined comeback.

There was a Sutton and Epsom debut for Sebastian Priest and another appearance for the veteran Steve Munford. Havant were also missing regulars like Elliott Bellman, Harrison Young and Scott Morris. After the silence for the Remembrance weekend the visitors kicked off in glorious sunshine on a mild winter’s afternoon. The crowd were immediately on their feet as after a few phases James Caddy, in space on the blindside, gave a wonderfully timed inside pass to Stefan Cooksammy who had come off his wing. A weaving run for 40 metres saw the winger touch down for the opening score. Freddy Bunting duly obliged with the conversion to send the Rugby Lane crowd into raptures and Suttonand Epsom led 7-0.

The Hampshire men bounced back to draw level after ten minutes. This time it was Reuben Knight with the 40-metre break though he was denied just short of the

line but support was on hand and a couple of passes later saw fullback Ben Chambers crossing the whitewash. Joel Knight added the extras to level the score at 7-7. It was not long before Havant were pressing for the lead. They drilled a penalty into the corner for a 5-metre line out. Resolute defence thwarted all that was thrown at the Sutton and Epsom line but the referee brought play back for an earlier infringement. Significantly it also meant a yellow card for S&E lock George Drye. The visitors immediately made their numerical advantage pay as hooker Sean Shepherd barrelled over from close-range. Joel Knight added the simple conversion and the Bedhampton boys had a 14-7 advantage. The fourteen men showed great spirit to restrict the opposition to only one additional Joel Knight penalty before parity was restored with S&E trailing by 7-17.

As the teams entered the second quarter the game ebbed to and fro before Joel Knight’s boot extended the Havant lead with another well struck penalty for 20-7 after 30 minutes. The Black and Whites stormed back. A quickly taken tap penalty on halfway by Austin Bell saw the hosts burst into the 22 and Ciaran Mohr was bundled into touch five metres short. S&E regained possession as they peppered the line. First, a sublime offload by Jack Howes nearly created a try in the right hand corner. Then the ball swung to the opposite flank as Gareth O’Brien and Stefan Cooksammy tried in vain before it finally went wide for debutant winger Seb Priest to score in the corner. Freddy Bunting converted from the touchline for 14-20.

The promotion contenders quickly capitalised on a missed clearance to touch and the Red and Whites marauded forward. After sustained pressure it was that man Shepherd again who proved unstoppable near the line. Joel Knight continued his impeccable kicking for 27-14 and the thirteen-point cushion was restored. With the interval fast approaching the hosts were awarded a penalty and Freddy Bunting reduced the deficit and the half-time whistle blew with Havant leading 27-17.

S&E restarted the game as Havant looked for that vital fourth try and a bonus point to maintain their title challenge whilst Sutton were eager for early points to get within a single score. At once the Black and Whites had a penalty and Freddy Bunting made it 20-27. Sutton and Epsom were now in the ascendancy and within 5 minutes Freddy Bunting was standing over another penalty. The kick 10 metres from the touchline drifted agonisingly wide. It was a temporary respite. The visitors failed to clear their lines and conceded ascrum in their 22. The ball was spun wide and a James Caddy tap pass and a wonderful Ciaran Mohr offload had Jack Howes within a metre. The ball was recycled and swung to the opposite flank where Josh Glanville was on hand to supply the finishing touches. Freddy Bunting’s conversion was greeted with a tumultuous roar with the score at 27-27. With a little less than 30 minutes to play the game had been transformed.

Not only the bonus point but also the win was under threat for the visitors. They responded in style pressing hard in the home 22. It was Joel Knight’s turn to add a penalty and he accepted a simple three points that put the Hooks Lane team back into the lead, 30-27. Buoyed by this success they went in search of that elusive fourth try and a wonderful attack was quelled by scrambling defence. Moments later a surging break by Freddy Bunting had Sutton on the front foot. However, passing and handling errors now began to frustrate the hosts who were thrown back onto the defensive. From a 5-metre line out superb defence held Havant up over the line. Then agony as the drop out went out on the full and more pressure ensued with a 5-metre scrum for the Hampshire men. A chance in the corner went begging as the cover arrived and the ball was passed into touch.

Sutton were now under siege and the next clearance resulted in a yellow card for Seb Priest as he took the catcher out in the air. The home-team would have to survive the vast majority of the remainder of the game with only 14. Moments later a certain score was denied by a terrific tackle. At the death Havant declined a most kickable penalty in the quest for a bonus point. A poorly executed line out resulted in an S&E scrum that soon became a penalty. The Black and Whites valiantly tried to run the ball from 80 metres out but to no avail as at the first opportunity the Red and Whites kicked it off the paddock to end the game. A pulsating performance by both sides ended with Havant winning and remaining in third place snapping at the heels of Camberley and Wimbledon.

Narrow losses have been the story for the Black and Whites this season and, similar to the Oxford Harlequins game, there was much to admire in pushing a top four team to the brink. Their resilience in the final quarter was magnificent. It was a superb team effort from 1 to 18 against a side aiming for promotion that had run Wimbledon very close a fortnight earlier. For the victors 16 points from the metronomic boot of Joel Knight and a brace of tries from the rampaging hooker Sean Shepherd was the foundation for another win. The visitors created more chances, had more territory and possession and on those indicators were worthy winners. However, rugby is not as simple as that and if your defence is organised and tenacious, you are fit, score tries and have a quality place-kicker you will be very competitive as were S&E in this game.

After a weekend of quiet reflection the league season reaches its halfway mark with the resumption of hostilities on Saturday 26 th November with Sutton’s trip to Braywick Park. Maidenhead after winning the opening four matches topped the table but then lost the next five on the spin before finally recording another win on Saturday. Last season the Berkshire team won the corresponding fixture with a try on the final play of the game. With the Black and Whites penchant for close games this campaign perhaps we might once again get more last minute drama.

Sutton and Epsom: Ciaran Mohr, Stefan Cooksammy, Freddie Bunting, Jamie See, Sebastian Priest, Gareth O’Brien, Austin Bell, Tom Boaden, Jack Howes, Will Lloyd, Josh Glanville, Matt Harwood, George Drye, Chris Farrell © and James Caddy. Replacements (all used): Rob Hegarty, George London and Steve Munford.

Havant: Ben Chambers, Harry Carr, Joel Knight ©, Jacob Knight, Scott Morris, Reuben Knight, Wes Dugan, Armandus Morgan, Sean Shepherd, Jake Waterman, Richard Janes, Sam Vince, Nathan Bellman, Harry Ransom and Dylan Lawley. Replacements (all used): Luke Marks, Jarod Leat and Jonah North.

Sutton & Epsom beaten by table toppers

5 February 2023



WIMBLEDON 41 – SUTTON & EPSOM 10 – 5th November. **Sutton & Epsom** and Wimbledon rugby is always an entertaining Derby match. Last season was a very underwhelming campaign for S& E but it had two glorious highlights with home and away triumphs over their local rivals. This season the teams could hardly be enjoying more contrasting fortunes. After an opening day loss to Camberley the Dons have swept all before them with a magnificent seven wins taking them to the top of the table. In stark contrast Sutton & Epsom have a solitary success over Brighton and numerous near misses.



Images: Courtesy Robin Kennedy - Sutton and Epsom RFC.

The match ran true to the current form book with the dominating Dons triumphant to the tune of 41-10. On a chill afternoon with leaden skies that threatened rain throughout S& E welcomed back Robbie Martey but were missing four forwards who had run Oxford Harlequins so close last weekend. Freddy Bunting kicked off as Sutton had the slope in their favour whilst Wimbledon had the breeze. The game started at a high tempo with both sides probing each other's defences.

First blood went to the hosts as wave upon wave of attacks crashed against S& E's formidable defence until they won a 5-metre penalty. Scrum half Alex Kerr tried to catch the Black & Whites out with a quick tap but moments later Ollie Kitto was scoring in the corner. Ed Morgan's conversion missed as the Dons led 5-0. The visitors replied in an instant, harrying the hosts from the restart they were awarded a penalty and Freddy Bunting made it 3-5. The Rugby Lane team had to be at their resilient best. They were aided on several occasions as the Barham Road boys failed to apply the coup de grâce.

On 20 minutes, it was a forward pass that denied the Dons. Five minutes later they made amends in stunning style. From a scrum near halfway a rapid blindside break was superbly executed as Alex Kerr scored and Ed Morgan added the extras for 12-3. Next it was Ollie Kitto who looked like creating another try but a forward pass by a prop meant another score was chalked off. It was a temporary stay of execution as the SW20 outfit took advantage of a 5-metre line out. A clean catch and a powerful drive ended with Max Freeman scoring and Ed Morgan's boot increased the lead to 19-3 after half an hour. The Cuddington Crescent team brought on Matt Harwood for an injured Ewan McTaggart and tried to gain a foothold in the fixture.

Wimbledon was not content with their healthy lead and attacked at every opportunity as the Black & Whites' tackling had to be at its resilient best and they scrapped for every ball at the breakdown. Twice more the home supporters groaned when first another forward pass and then an errant delivery undid their best efforts. The first half ended with Sutton trailing 3-19. For S& E it was vital to score early in the second period to resurrect memories of the jinx that afflicted the league leaders last season. If the visitors could score perhaps all those missed chances in the first half would weigh heavily on the minds of the hosts. The match resumed with Wimbledon piling on the pressure down the hill. It only took five minutes for Ollie Kitto to add the finishing touches for 24-3 and his second try.

The hosts were in no mood to ease up and replacement prop Malek Touilzak broke from halfway but a delayed pass gave the Sutton cover the opportunity to escape and Tom Boaden was on hand to steal and the danger was averted. However, five minutes later Malek Touilzak made amends as he powered over from close range. Despite the conversion failing the lead was now 29-3 in deteriorating conditions. S& E finally got their hands on the ball and a well-angled run by Robbie Martey was only halted by a high tackle and Wimbledon were reduced to 14 men for 10 minutes. Sutton opted for the scrum and turned the screw winning a penalty and taking it quickly advanced into the 22.

With the hosts on the retreat with an overlap S& E inexplicably kicked the ball. But despair turned to delight as soon after replacement Jack Howes, only just on the pitch, scored from a well executed line out. Freddy Bunting chipped over the conversion to reduce the margin to 10-29. With fifteen minutes remaining the game opened up. A quick penalty in their own 22 saw replacement Rhys Morgan make a thrilling break deep into the opposite 22 where Ollie Kitto was on hand to score and collect yet another league hat trick for the lethal winger this season. Ed Morgan's aim was true to make it 36-10.

As the Rugby Lane men went searching for a late consolation try the Beverley Meads men threatened to cut loose. Ed Morgan rounded off a fine afternoon at 10 as he dummied his way through the defence to score his team's sixth and final try. Though he failed to add the conversion to his try the Dons were now 41-10 to the good. In the final ten minutes Sutton's chances for an additional score were undone by errors, no doubt due to understandable weariness after the draining effects of so much defence and tackling. The hosts were not error free as the familiar forward pass returned and probing kicks came to nought.

The final whistle blew and the 41-10 result meant that the hosts collected another bonus point win to stay in pole position whilst the visitors contemplated life at the other end of the table. Wimbledon thoroughly justified their lofty status atop of the league. Slick passing in the backs with plenty of pace and skill, robust ball-carrying forwards and a hard tackling defence is a potent cocktail for success. Sutton were, to a man, unflinching in defence making tackle after tackle as they tried to stem the flow but were second best on the day.

The league programme continues next week, Saturday 12th November, as Sutton host Havant who beat S& E home and away last season. The Black & Whites will be looking to redress the balance this time. The kick off will be 2:30pm at Rugby Lane.

Sutton & Epsom: Mike Davies, Stefan Cook, Freddie Bunting, Jamie See, Robbie Martey, Gareth O'Brien, Austin Bell, Tom Boaden, Alex Mount, Will Lloyd, Josh Glanville, Ewan McTaggart, George London, Chris Farrell & James Caddy.

Replacements (all used): Jack Howes, Matt Harwood & Jack Butt.

Wimbledon: Alastair Duddell, Ollie Kitto, Paul Hendry, Henry Peuble, Bradley Pinkham, Ed Morgan, Alex Kerr, Tom Boot, Harrison Scoble, Bradley Ugodulunwa, Christopher Dalley, Jack Cooke, Max Freeman, Jacob Farnworth, Zane Dallinger.

Replacements: Malek Touilzak, Mark Scott & Rhys Morgan.