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London Calling Time with a Sutton & Epsom Win

9 April 2024



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

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

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

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

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

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

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demonstrating their quality and gave the Sutton & Epsom defence added confidence in what was a surprisingly uneventful third quarter.

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

With the game in the balance and in time added on Reeds were within touching distance of glory but had the consolation of a penalty. It was an easy decision for captain Herbie Finn to opt for the kick at goal as fullback Pete Cole effortlessly put the visitors 10-7 up. One could imagine Captain Finn imploring his team to secure the restart and send it deep into Sutton territory and on no account concede a penalty. With the billowing breeze making the restart more of a lottery than it might have been the Black & Whites were given the lifeline of a penalty. It was advanced to the corner and another penalty followed the lineout. Sutton went for route one as tempers boiled over before the final play of the season. The forwards provide a mass of steaming humanity on the try-line and Rob Hegarty squeezed over to win the game for Sutton & Epsom. It was left for George London to attempt the touchline conversion and despite a passable impression of All Black legend Don Clarke it fell short. The final whistle blew and Sutton & Epsom had snatched victory by 12-10. The supporters retired to the clubhouse and for those who live in a tinkerless world they ruminated on what might have been in 2023-4. The Sutton & Epsom victory was synonymous with the man of the hour, George London, it was full of determination, a never say die attitude and a will to win in adversity that saw Sutton over the line. Reeds had the edge in the scrummage and the more threatening back division. However, the powerful wind did not bring the anticipated cascade of points as both XVs demonstrated determined defence and it was the Black & Whites who gained the points by virtue of winning the try battle by 2-1 but only at the eleventh hour with Brunnhilde on her final chorus.

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

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

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