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Medway Overpower Sorry Sutton & Epsom

16 October 2023

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

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

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

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

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

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

On the half hour drizzle descended, a rainbow embraced the ground and the Sutton slumber ended in dramatic fashion. Jordan Huie, playing his first game of the season, received the ball near halfway. Initially he did well to avoid being bundled into touch and then showing great strength in contact he wriggled free of his pursuers and passed to fullback Ciaran Mohr.

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

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

Though the conversion from the flank failed the Kent team had extended their lead to 19-8 with a touch under half an hour left on the clock. A quick retort from the Black and Whites was imperative but the next score came the way of the visitors and secured them a bonus point. The centre combo of Clement and Sipawa were only just denied but the ball was

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recycled and open side Jonah Hyde touched down for his second try of the afternoon. Jack Johnson landed another punch on the teetering body of Sutton with the extras to lead 26-8 as the game entered the final quarter. S and E, as per the first period, came to life and flooded into the Medway 22 and Ross Parsons' pass to the waiting Ewan McTaggart was knocked on by the defence and the hosts had a 5-metre scrum. 18 points adrift on the scoreboard it was a must score moment for the Rugby Lane team. The visiting pack disrupted the scrummage and the briefest of sieges was lifted.

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

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

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

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

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

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