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Rugby result reads well for Sutton & Epsom

11 December 2024



Sutton & Epsom RFC 17 – Reeds Weybridge 11. Saturday 7th December 2024.

The arrival of Reeds Weybridge at Rugby Lane signalled the culmination of the first half of the season having played the other ten teams in the league in the previous rounds. The Whiteley Village outfit lay third in the table. It was an identical position to the same stage as last season but they enjoyed an improved record of eight wins and 40 points compared to seven wins and 32 points. In comparison, Sutton & Epsom are one win, two places and six points better off than the 2023-4 statistics. On the last occasion these teams met it was for the denouement of the season and S&E won by 12-10 with a late Rob Hegarty try. It was again a thrilling affair with Sutton triumphing 17-11 for their fifth win on the spin.

Storm Darragh had put paid to the game at Priestfields but that was the only postponement as Reeds kicked off with the clubhouse and a strong wind behind them. S&E had brought in Matt Symonds and Josh Rea to replace Jordan Huie and Jac Davies. Sam Lennie was elevated from the bench to make his first start as hooker with Dan Jones switching to the flank. The Black & Whites incurred an early injury when Callum Gibson was replaced by Tom Boaden within the opening ten minutes. The visitors enjoyed more of the possession and territory in the first quarter but the conditions and ferocious defence by all concerned limited opportunities. Reeds progress was additional hampered by frustrating penalties. On the half hour excellent Sutton defence turned over the ball in their 22 and Dan Jones broke the shackles with a stunning burst to halfway. RW responded in kind and won a penalty which they decided to kick for points. The reliable Jack Jesty opened their account for a 3-0 advantage.

From the restart Sutton were gifted the chance to level the scores but as is their wont they kicked to the corner in search of greater rewards. The gamble was justified as the forwards completed their primary task of securing possession. The war of attrition was declined in favour of spinning the ball wide. The ball was transferred adroitly to Angus Findlay who again demonstrated his increasing aptitude for scoring in the corner. Even for the prodigious Freddy Bunting a touchline conversion against the wind was beyond his scope but his side led 5-3. Reeds Weybridge sought to take advantage of the wind and kicked into the home 22 where a scrambling Gareth O'Brien escorted it to touch. Another chip ahead appeared to harmlessly roll dead but the referee brought play back for S&E pulling down the lineout. Jack Jesty stepped up to regain the lead at 6-5 in time added on. A feature of the match was the numerous injury breaks throughout and it meant Sutton had plenty of time to reply.

Having secured the restart Sam Lennie twice carried powerfully in the 22. It was the host's who now had a penalty that gained no advantage. Usually when the ball is brought back for an indiscretion the defence can reset whilst the offence carefully considers its options. On this occasion the RW team had overpopulated their left flank leaving their right as weak as the Ardennes in 1940. Gareth O'Brien was alert to the possibilities and took advantage of Sam Lennie as his decoy as he glided through the remnants of the defence to celebrate his 50th cap in style. Fredding Bunting accepted the extras after the minor inconvenience of replacing the ball on the tee. The Black & Whites led 12-6. There was still four more minutes of the additional eleven to go. The final Reeds attack was snuffed out by excellent smothering defence by Adam Bibby and Mr Carter finally ended the half with Sutton ahead by 12-6.

The second half began to recall striking parallels with the final fixture of last season. Formidable attacking waves crashing against adamantine defences. The hosts besieged the visitor's 22. The game was set on an endless loop with Sisyphus and Tantalus starring for Sutton and Horatio playing the lead for Reeds. The Black & Whites seemed bereft of the traditional timber equine solution. Recent clinical efficiency in their opponent's 22 was replaced by frustration against an impenetrable defence. The elements added a slightly comical note as the wind hampered clearance kicks of sufficient distance. However, the Reeds solution of running a penalty 5 metres from their line and kicking to their wing was hardly a prosaic solution. It might require some training ground practice or only play that card on a still afternoon. The ball ended up being caught by Sutton as it descended near the Reeds' line in the corner.

Meanwhile for the Rugby Lane crowd the habit of declining the kickable three points was being questioned in the grandstand. As the game progressed the penalties became increasingly adjacent to the uprights. Fuelled by their libations the crowd implored, beseeched and vociferously heckled for a 9-point lead. The captain was impervious to the obsecrations of the mob. In gathering gloom with normal time evaporating the Sutton pack delivered at the eleventh hour. Tom Boaden forced his way over for the try to break the magnificent defence of the opposition. The Bunting conversion missed by inches as S&E held a 17-6 lead entering time added on. For the second half the crowd would enjoy 14 additional minutes.

It would have been easy for the Reeds Weybridge team to have been downcast after their Herculean defensive efforts had been thwarted so late in the game but they demonstrated tremendous team spirit to switch to the attacking mode. They

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were given a quick boost when Josh Rea received a yellow card for a high contact reducing Sutton to 14. Finally, they managed to create space and fullback Marcus Clark set off like a giraffe being released from captivity. He outpaced the initial cover and then stepped out of the covering tackle to complete a wonderful try from halfway. If Freddy Bunting's miss was unlucky then Jack Jesty's appeared to be cursed as it was blown narrowly astray at the last instant.

Trailing 11-17 Reeds threw everything at Sutton who did not help themselves by conceding numerous penalties. As inevitably as a game of amateur darts finishes with multiple efforts at double one this match was to conclude 5 metres from the Black & White line. Reeds resorted to their most powerful ball carriers to smash their way over. Sutton were equal to the task with a collective will and tremendous tackling. Finally, the defence employed the 'Irish Kiss' and prevented the Reeds man getting to the deck. Mr Carter awarded S&E the scrum and blew the final whistle to end a titanic struggle with Sutton & Epsom worthy winners by 17-11.

For the hosts the centre combination of Bunting and Bibby neutralised the potent opposition backs. Sam Lennie was mightily impressive with his throwing on a blustery afternoon and his penetrative carries. The pack to a man tackled ferociously and demonstrated admirable control in difficult conditions. Against a less resolute defence Sutton could have been out of sight. Once again the team impressed in the final moments with their heroic resistance by preventing a decisive score. Reeds failed to capitalise in the first period when they had the elements but the second half showed that a favourable wind does not guarantee points. In adversity Reeds Weybridge showed great character and no little skill first to survive and then to threaten to win the match.

Next Saturday Rugby Lane supporters can enjoy back-to-back home fixture with the 2pm game against Beckenham. The Kent team are enjoying another fine start to the season and are in pole position in the table. The visitors will be keen to repeat their 29-14 success at Blamoral Avenue in September. However, Sutton will be wanting to add another top of the league scalp to those of Sidcup and Medway whose colours have been downed at Rugby Lane already this campaign. Finally, hearty congratulations to Jo Evans who on Sunday in the match against Battersea Ironsides became the first Sutton woman to play 100 league matches. Jo has been a stalwart of this remarkably successful squad that has risen through the leagues to the exalted status of playing in the Women's Championship South 1 rubbing shoulders with the likes of Richmond, Bath and London Irish.

Sutton & Epsom
O'Brien, Symonds, Bibby, Bunting ©, Findlay, Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Lennie, Gibson, Glanville, McTaggart, Tame, Jones & Hegarty.
Replacements: Boaden, Rea & Hilton.

Reeds Weybridge
Clark M, Brown, Maitland, Clark J, Endeley, Jesty, Palmer, Day L, Day R, Beavis, Goodwin, Finn ©, Ewington, Wasko & Wastie.
Replacements: Howe, Tyndale & Homfrey.

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