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Sidcup Burst The Sutton & Epsom Bubble

13 October 2025



Sidcup 22 Sutton & Epsom RFC 12. Saturday 11th October.

Sutton & Epsom first visited Crescent Farm in 1914 for a 25-0 win and it is a delight that, despite the ravages of league rugby, a fixture dating back over 100 years and having been played in excess of 80 times still survives and is played on the same ground. Both clubs had started the season strongly and the form book suggested a close encounter. Sutton & Epsom had garnered maximum points whilst Sidcup had enjoyed a trio of triumphs in the opening four rounds. After a bruising encounter the Kent club inflicted the first defeat of the season on their opponents from Surrey by 22-12.

This fixture was blessed with glorious sunshine throughout on a still afternoon conducive to playing rugby. Experience replaced youth at 9 for the Black & Whites as Steve Munford came in for the injured Laurence Wise. Otherwise it was salvete for Messrs Finney, Lennard and O'Brien as the revolving door of selection spun at a modest pace at Rugby Lane. Sidcup kicked off under the steely gaze of referee Jed Wolfram who had journeyed down from Harrogate. The initial exchanges set the tone for the contest as both defences threw themselves into their duties with relentless relish. Time and space were at a premium as thunderous tackles littered the field.

After ten minutes Sutton & Epsom had the first opportunity to open the scoring. It was another chapter in the rugby opus, "Take Three Points Or Kick Into The Corner", and it was no surprise to the travelling Rugby Lane support that the Bunting boot kicked for territory rather than lighting up the scoreboard. The ball was overthrown and lost. An infringement meant Take Two and the further shunning of the three in search of higher riches. The swarming Sidcup defence held firm through multiple phases before forcing an error. It was to be third time lucky on the quarter-hour. This time the catch and drive was executed to perfection as Sam Lennie powered his way over. The conversion from the flank went astray but Sutton & Epsom belatedly led 5-0.

As the first quarter concluded the Black & Whites nearly conjured a try from a quickly taken penalty near halfway. Tom Lennard made an incisive break and Gareth O'Brien was denied by cover in the corner. A

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relieved Sidcup dropped out from under their posts and it was their turn to test the defensive fortitude of the visitors. The Kent team camped in the Surrey 22 and besieged the line. Heroic defence on their line was punctuated by two penalties. Following the second the home team opened their account with a slick catch and drive routine that saw lock Tom Epps ushered over the line. Josh Twyford's conversion came back off the upright and the score was 5-5 approaching the half-hour mark.

Sutton & Epsom had an opportunity to regain the lead when Gareth O'Brien's kick to the 22 was enhanced by an excellent chase forcing a knock-on. Sutton & Epsom appeared to create a try as they descended on the corner only for Sidcup to intercept the vital pass and clear to halfway. With the first half approaching time added on the hosts once more set out their stall in the visitors' 22. The forwards advanced and a try appeared to be a certainty but the defence on their own line by Sutton & Epsom was mightily impressive from a 5-metre penalty. However, all the commendable work was undone by a truly idiotic penalty as a forward bellyflopped onto the ruck. Without hesitation the ball was sent to the corner. The Crescent Farm lineout, like a well-oiled machine, churned out another try for another lock, as Freddie Ruff muscled over. Josh Twyford added the extras for a 12-5 lead.

In the dying embers of the first half the home crowd enjoyed a bonus as their team benefited from their ascendancy with a penalty awarded under the posts. Common sense, rather than greed, prevailed. Josh Twyford concluded the first period with a simple three points as his side went to their dressing room very satisfied with a 15-5 lead. It had been a very even first half but Sidcup had been the more clinical of the two teams making the most of their visits to the Sutton & Epsom 22.

Freddy Bunting kicked off with Sidcup playing, as is their preference, with the slope towards the clubhouse bar in the second half. With an early penalty at the scrummage the home team were able to advance to the Sutton & Epsom 22. However, early indications of a Sutton & Epsom revival were given by an immediate boost by a break with centres Bunting and Bibby weaving their way to the enemy's half. The territorial gain was enhanced by a penalty as the Black & Whites had a lineout with 10 metres to go. An infringement let the hosts off the hook. From the clearance kick from the scrum Agu Benson ran back the ball with great effect and marvellous continuity from the forwards had Sutton & Epsom threatening until they conceded a penalty.

The optimistic opening having been overcome, the Crescent Farm crowd were starting to enjoy their team's control of territory and possession. With the sun on their backs and the slope in their favour they went in search of a third try. The score came a dozen minutes into the half. Once more a lineout ball was controlled and the forwards advanced and Freddie Ruff scored his second. The simple conversion was added by Josh Twyford and Sidcup led 22-5.

Trailing by 17 points the triumvirate of Agu Benson, Archie Fitzgerald and Sam Lennie with their powerful carrying, time and again, tried to free Sutton & Epsom from the Sidcup shackles. It was a testimony to the quality of the home defence that they only yielded in time added on.

The game entered the last quarter with the overriding feeling that in a game with two evenly matched sides it would take something spectacular to wrestle the advantage away from Sidcup as their defence was secure and controlling affairs. The Kent side had the luxury of knowing that, apart from the carrot of a bonus point fourth try, they did not have to score tries. Calculated kicking and tireless tackling kept Sutton & Epsom at arm's length. Normal time was up as Sutton & Epsom mounted another attack in the opposition

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22. They were awarded a penalty. Dan Jones, celebrating his 50th 1st XV league appearance, carried towards the right-hand corner. As is his habit, Rob Hegarty emerged from the ruck with a blistering turn of speed to score in the corner. Captain Bunting stepped up and impressively converted. Sutton & Epsom trailed 12-22 and there was the glimmer of a losing bonus point to be had.

Time ran out for the visitors who not only lost their unbeaten status but also went pointless for the first time this season. Sidcup deserved their 22-12 victory that was constructed on the solid foundations of a secure scrummage, highly effective lineout and an outstanding defence that rapidly enveloped the opposition. Hooker Harry Large, as befitting his name, had a huge game. The boiler room of the second row was rewarded for their hard work with tries. It was a fine team performance of boundless concentration, hard work and bone-shaking tackling.

For the Black & Whites the game was possibly lost in the first half when they failed to capitalise on their period of ascendancy as chances for tries slipped through their grasp. However, the never-say-die effort was epitomised by their score in time added on. Archie Fitzgerald had his best game for the club, once again Agu Benson demonstrated what a valuable addition he is to the team and their defence of their line was magnificent to behold.

Next Saturday, 18th October, the Sutton & Epsom charabanc is on the road once more with a day trip to the Rectory Field to face Gravesend RFC. The Kent club lie sixth in the table after a couple of wins and a draw from their opening five encounters.

Sutton & Epsom: O’Brien, Fitzgerald, Bibby, Bunting (c), Benson, Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Lennie, Mount, Finney, McTaggart, Rea, Jones and Hegarty. Reps: Hilton, Tame and Scott.

Sidcup: Twyford, Ellison, McMahon, Smith, Keeley L., Ubee, Ibrahim, Keeley H., Large, Carmen, Epps, Ruff, Healey, Williams and Caple. Reps: Watson, Fordham and Stokes.

John Croysdill

Image by Robin Kennedy from a 2024 Sutton & Epsom and Sidcup fixture

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