

Sutton and Epsom blow the Cobwebs away

18 March 2024



Sutton & Epsom RFC 49 Cobham 13. Saturday 16th March.

Having lost to the basement boys of London Cornish, the Exiles gaining their first win on the road for over a year, Sutton and Epsom supporters arrived at Rugby Lane with a sense of mild trepidation. Could the proverbial lightning revisit with the arrival of eleventh-placed Cobham who had lost their last eleven matches. For those fearing that the wheels had come off the Black & White charabanc it appears, on Saturday's evidence, to have passed its MOT and was in perfect working order as the team ran in a magnificent seven tries for an emphatic 49-13 triumph. The victory mathematically secured Sutton & Epsom's position in Level 6.

Freddy Bunting kicked off into the breeze and initiated a period of high tempo attacking rugby that saw his team living in the Cobham 22 for the majority of the opening 15 minutes. The visitors defended impressively none more so than when from a tapped 5-metre penalty Josh Glanville was held up over the line by a superb tackle. Having had all of the game Sutton & Epsom conceded the first points when, on their first sortie into the S&E half, Jonathan Holmes kicked a penalty for a 3-0 lead. A few minutes later and the Black & Whites received a second dose of unpalatable medicine as Holmes made it 6-0.

It was at this stage the classic debate of whether to kick for points or seek greater rewards was raging amongst the crowd. The hosts approach was to turn down every kick at goal and seek the higher tariff score. In the course of the first period they were to reject many kicks with several in front of the uprights. Finally on the half hour their bravery was rewarded. The ball went wide and Lawrence Elliott, running a superb line, broke through and using all of his strength powered over. Freddy Bunting splendidly bisected the uprights for a 7-6 lead. Cobham's attempt to regain the lead with a third penalty failed as the first period neared its conclusion.

Approaching time added on Cobham were reduced to 14 when Mr Priddle issued a yellow card to blindside Max Hales who departed as a result of the cumulative effect of infringements in the 22. Sutton & Epsom went for the tap penalty and it was the redoubtable Alex Mount who stretched out to secure the try. Freddy Bunting added the simple conversion for a 14-6 lead. The restart is often the most dangerous moment and the Black & Whites conceded a penalty but the visitors attempts to secure a platform to attack the Sutton line faltered and the referee blew for half-time. S&E had a vital 14-6 lead with a man advantage to take into the second period with the wind behind them.

The Rugby Lane team pressed hard to extend their lead in the opening exchanges of the second half attempting to benefit from their numerical and meteorological advantages. The Bunting boot put his team in the 22. Cobham survived for ten minutes before hooker Chris Farrell collected his sixth try of the campaign. Captain Bunting made it three out of three as Sutton led 21-6. The visitors then showed the fighting spirit one would expect from a team teetering on the brink of relegation. Awarded a penalty in the 22 they tapped and went. Sutton & Epsom had failed to retreat and they repeated the option with captain and scrum-half Ryan Saunders scoring. Jonathan Holmes converted to put Cobham back in the hunt trailing 13-21.

Barely had the inspiring words of encouragement of a comeback drifted on the wind and Cobham were standing behind their posts awaiting another Sutton & Epsom conversion. From the restart Dan Jones gathered the ball from a ruck outside the visitors' 22 and exploited a gap to streak away for the try. With the extras S&E led 28-13 and had secured their try bonus point. That score thoroughly demoralised the men from the Memorial Ground as it inspired the Rugby Lane XV. The game entered the final quarter and the hosts provided their faithful fans with their most exhilarating rugby seen at home this season.

Sensible tactical kicking by half-backs Munford and Lennard kept the hosts on the attack. A wonderful break from Tom Lennard at 10 looked certain to lead to a try but he was felled by a tap tackle close to glory. The crowd did not have to wait long for try Number 5. The ball went to the opposite flank and a training ground routine was executed

to perfection from a lineout. The ball was secured, the line-break made and the overlap exploited as Ciaran Mohr strolled in at the corner. Freddy Bunting made light of the testing conversion for 35-13.

Try number six again owed its success to repetition on cold winter nights. A 5-metre lineout was secured and the pack advanced forward to provide Rob Hegarty with his eighth try of the season. It was a fitting reward for the quality of the lineout from the triumvirate of McTaggart, Pulvirenti and Glanville who had given Sutton & Epsom an excellent platform all afternoon. With a degree of inevitability Freddy Bunting converted and it was 42-13. For the first time this season at Rugby Lane the home crowd could enjoy a relaxing conclusion to a match. Previous contests might have been thrilling for the neutral observer but had provided far too much anxiety. Cobham attempted to end on a high point and looked destined to secure an otiose try. However a wayward pass bounced into the grateful hands of Angus Findlay who sped away from his own 22 for his first 1st XV league try. Freddy Bunting completed a perfect afternoon with the boot and the match concluded with Sutton & Epsom enjoying a resounding 49-13 win.

Apart from the security of success it was a red-letter day for two of the Sutton and Epsom side. Steve Munford in playing his 215th league match for the club surpassed Steve Warnham's total and lies second to the 251-game Sam Frost. Meanwhile, with his first successful kick of the afternoon, Freddy Bunting broke Sam Hurley's 2015-6 record of 208 points in a league season. It was a redemptive afternoon for the skipper after he had appeared to have supped at the river Lethe on his last outing. Sutton & Epsom may be breathing easier but carnivorous creatures circle the Cobham carrion as descent into the abyss of Level 7 seems probable after Gravesend's victory over Beckenham. With the 'Jersey Reprieve' there will be the incongruous site of Cobham supporters googling the results of Chosen Hill FP, Kirkby Lonsdale and Old Crossleyans in the weeks to come. Next Saturday S&E enjoy their last away day of the campaign with a first visit to Horn Park since January 2007 to take on Old Colfeians who they defeated 21-17 in December.

Sutton & Epsom

O'Brien, Huie, Elliott, Bunting ©, Findlay, Lennard, Munford, Mount, Farrell, Gibson, Glanville, McTaggart, Jones, Pulvirenti & Hegarty.

Replacements: Boaden, Tame & Mohr.

Cobham

Penfold, Springett, Boswell, Burnett, Yorke, Holmes, Saunders ©, Aujla, Muirhead, Bliss, Westgarth-Taylor, Farmer, Hales, Blackwood & Porter.

Replacements: Nunn, Keefe & O'Connor.

Image courtesy Robin Kennedy