EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

19th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

Up to £1 where sold

Sutton and Epsom Dig Deep for Thrilling Win

5 October 2026



Sutton and Epsom 34 Battersea Ironsides 31 Saturday 3rd October

One of the quirks of the various delays in the season's opening is that the Rugby Lane supporters will be severely undernourished in terms of their 1st XV league diet. The campaign was always intended to break with recent tradition and open on the second, rather than first, Saturday in September. Then the weather intervened to see the curtain raised belatedly last Saturday. In addition, there is a moment when clubs have back-to-back road trips in the fixture list. All of the above conspired to make Saturday's game against the Ironsides the only home fixture before Halloween. Fortuitously, for those who attended, the crowd revelled in a ten-try thriller of fluctuating fortunes with the hosts emerging triumphant in a tense conclusion by 34-31.

Sutton and Epsom made two changes from Week 1 with Eric Duey and debutant Tipene Maxwell appearing on the bench. Before the kick-off there was a minute's silence to commemorate one of the most respected men in Sutton and Epsom's rugby history. Bryan Chapple was a former player, President and committeeman par excellence who was also one of the instigators of the Seven Counties Merit Table. Ominous black clouds loomed over Rugby Lane as Alex Lambe's whistle and Cameron Baker's boot initiated proceedings. Both teams pressed hard for the opening score as attacking verve rather than caution was the order of the day. After a dozen minutes, much to the delight of the Boaden Fan Club, the new centurion Thomas scored following an impressive catch and drive from the lineout by the Sutton and Epsom pack. Freddy Bunting lost his footing attempting the conversion as Sutton and Epsom led 5-0.

The brevity of the lead was as heartening for Ironsides supporters as it was depressing for the Rugby Lane faithful. S&E fluffed their lines at the restart, Battersea regained the ball and centre Ben Lyons celebrated his 100th cap in style with a dazzling solo run. Cameron Baker added the extras to put Ironsides 7-5 up. Sutton and Epsom were marginally slower by a minute with their riposte with a sweeping move by the backs that was expertly concluded by winger Angus Findlay. The conversion drifted wide but the hosts had regained the initiative and led 10-7. The score was synonymous with a much-improved performance from the back division compared with the stuttering style of the opening Saturday. The passing was crisper as players ran onto the ball at pace. Equally, the Green & Whites threequarters had power and pace that promised this would be another high-scoring encounter.

Approaching the half-hour the Black & Whites extended their lead as forwards and backs combined with devastating effect. Securing the lineout flanker Dan Jones made a break. Quick ball came to Freddy Bunting who delayed his pass to perfection to put fellow centre Adam Bibby into a gap. The fast-stepping New Zealander with instant acceleration and meandering menace was unstoppable as he scored near the posts. Freddy Bunting opened his account for 17-7. Five minutes later the lead was increased with a Bunting penalty as the scoreboard read 20-7.

Battersea's progress was being severely hindered by a lineout that was not functioning. However, the visitors finished the first period with some of their best play. Number 9 Ed Carr, alert to what was unfolding before him, took a quick penalty and headed for the uprights. Desperate defence finally hauled him down. The try soon followed as the ball was transferred wide and, with Ironsides in abundance, Ben Lyons dummied and strolled home for his second try. Cameron Baker converted to see his side trail 14-20. Despite the best endeavours of all concerned there was no further scoring as the whistle blew for the interval. Players and spectators took a breather from the entertainment. With a history of nail-biting finishes and two teams already demonstrating their attacking prowess there were great expectations for more tries to come.

There was nearly a quick Battersea encore at the start of the second half as Ed Carr took another quick tap penalty. Sutton and Epsom were saved by a splendid tackle on Amir Sultan in the corner by Gareth O'Brien. Five minutes later the Ironsides were celebrating another try. Turning over the ball at the breakdown they countered at pace and fullback Tom Maher scythed through the defence. The 15 was halted on the line but blindside Dan McCleary scored when the ball went wide. The conversion from the flank hit the upright to deny Cameron Baker as Battersea trailed by a solitary point at 19-20. S&E replaced winger Finlay Scott with the fourth member of their Kiwi commune as Tipene Maxwell made his debut.

The Green & Whites had gained the upper hand to such an extent in the third quarter that the Black & Whites barely had the ball in their hands. The Sutton and Epsom supporters were lifted by a thunderous Maxwell tackle as he introduced himself to the uninitiated. However, it was Ed Carr, who was proving to be a most uncomfortable thorn in the home side, with another quick tap and go that exposed the S&E defences. Dan McCleary was on hand to collect his second try. Baker bisected the uprights for the 26-20 lead and a bonus point for Battersea Ironsides. The transformation of the fixture was to become more profound within five minutes as the visitors crossed the whitewash again. It was a scrappy affair as the

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

hosts struggled to gather a loose ball and in the ensuing confusion prop Evan Jones joyously scored in the corner. The conversion failed but Battersea Ironsides had turned the match around with 24 unanswered points to lead 31-20.

Feast and famine in terms of points scoring had been a rather frustrating theme of Sutton and Epsom's previous campaign. The XV had shown enough in the first period to offer their supporters hope that this match had not disappeared over the horizon. Their first priority was to get a fair share of possession as the game entered the final quarter. An invaluable 50/22 gave the Black & Whites an attacking lineout. The ball was secured and the forwards rumbled on before the ball was spread to the opposite touch. Lock Ewan McTaggart celebrated his birthday with an emphatic score to resuscitate the ailing Sutton and Epsom side. Freddy Bunting reduced the deficit further as S&E trailed 27-31.

For those who like the concept of the 'turning point' in a sporting context perhaps it came moments later. Sutton and Epsom were countering on the halfway when Battersea intercepted and set off for an inevitable try under the posts. But the shrill blast of Mr Lambe's whistle indicated a penalty for offside that was greeted with relief by all those favouring the men in Black & White. S&E kicked to the 22 where their forwards, now resembling an unstoppable force, urged on by the crowd squandered their chance with a knock-on. Amid growing tension and fluctuating fortunes the game entered the final minutes of normal time.

Powered with renewed self-belief the hosts chased down a kick to win a penalty. The ball was propelled to prime position in the corner. Possession was secured, the forwards rumbled forward and the crowd held their breath. Mr Lambe set off arm aloft to stand under the posts to indicate a penalty try. It was greeted with raucous acclaim and an ironic smile from Sam Lennie as he realised that it would not add to his considerable tally of tries. S&E were back ahead 34-31. There were echoes of the Hammersmith & Fulham game the previous Saturday as the hosts were required to survive for a few minutes.

Reduced to 14 the Ironsides rallied for one final assault. The restart went loose but Sutton and Epsom secured it only to see the clearance charged down. Then Battersea were awarded a penalty in front of the posts near the 22. After a lengthy pause in proceedings the visitors decided to go for glory and take a tap penalty. The consequences were disastrous. The ball carrier was isolated and the ball was turned over. Then Adam Bibby launched a tremendous clearance into the opposition 22 and the chasing players forced the lineout. The home team won the ball and were awarded a penalty that was prodded to touch to conclude a wonderful contest with Sutton and Epsom 34-31 victors.

As is normally the case in this fixture either side could have been triumphant. Building on their win in Week 1 S&E were far more threatening with ball in hand. Adam Bibby was outstanding in every facet of the game as the team demonstrated resilience and self-belief to turn the tide in the final quarter. Battersea Ironsides with their disruptive forwards at the breakdown, astute Ed Carr at 9 and a surplus of strong runners in their back division will not struggle to score tries this season and will be tough opponents for every team in the league. For Sutton and Epsom next Saturday is the start of three sojourns to the Garden of England with a visit to Priestfields to renew relations with Medway who have returned to the league after one season in Level 5.

Sutton and Epsom

O'Brien, Scott, Bibby, Bunting, Findlay A, Lennard, Findlay E, Johnson, Lennie, Beck, McTaggart, Glanville, Rea, Jones & Hegarty (captain).

Replacements: Boaden, Tame & Lovatt.

Battersea Ironsides

Maher, Sultan, Bell, Lyons, Craig, Baker, Carr, Jones, Lewis, Chetwynd, Kemp, Coleman, McCleary, Chitan (captain) & Bishop.

Replacements: Batterbury, Mason & Ford.

John Croysdill

Photo credit: Robin Kennedy

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd. Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY