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Sutton and Epsom sink Sidcup

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Sutton & Epsom RFC 30 – Sidcup 20. Saturday 4th November. Regional 2 South East is a most competitive league where any side can overturn its opponent so giving hope to supporters every Saturday afternoon. However, for the followers of Sutton and Sidcup they knew only too well that on occasion you have to win games. This campaign had witnessed only a solitary success for both camps and this fixture was therefore a meeting of the damned duo in terms of relegation spots. To the unaffiliated observer the game may have had the appearance of two bald men fighting over a comb but to these two proud clubs meeting under strained circumstances it was a match of the utmost importance. The result would lead to the bells ringing out for both clubs whether they were the alarm variety of relegation or angelic church ones heralding success was still to be determined. By the final whistle it was the hosts who were in the mood for the seasonal fireworks as they triumphed by 30-20.

After the season stalled in deference to the World Cup Final hostilities renewed at Rugby Lane as Sutton welcomed one of her oldest opponents in Sidcup. Despite the tempestuous weather the match was played on a fine surface and mercilessly minus rain as Freddy Bunting kicked off. The opening exchanges saw both teams attempting to run the ball. The Kent side's first entry to the Sutton 22 was undermined when they conceded a penalty. In contrast for S&E a Callum Gibson charge down saw Chris Farrell surge towards glory before the referee brought it back for a penalty to S&E. Captain Bunting kicked to the corner for the attacking line out. Having secured the ball the forwards escorted George London over the line to score the first try. Freddy Bunting added the extras for a morale-boosting 7-0 lead after 10 minutes.

Following some excellent defence the Black & Whites looked like giving Sidcup a second dose of medicine as they kicked a penalty into the corner. However, the throw in went askew and the visitors were awarded a relieving scrummage. Ten minutes later the men from Kent showed S&E how to score from an attacking line out but not in the classical mode. Having secured the ball Mr Tobias Whinney halted proceedings with a shrill blast of his whistle. He had taken objection to winger Max Russell's involvement and issued a yellow card and then jogged under the posts to give the Crescent Farm side a penalty try. This was the fourth time this season that the hosts had suffered this draconian sanction as the visitors levelled the score at 7-7.

Reduced to 14 Sutton & Epsom introduced Messrs Boaden & Hegarty for Gibson & London in the hope of holding out. Sidcup were then inconvenienced by the loss of scrum half Sam Leamon to injury. Then his half-back partner, Josh Twyford, made a telling contribution with a steepling kick. The ball descending from the heavens and S&E winger Robbie Martey jumped to contest for the ball on halfway but the ricochet was re-gathered by Sidcup. A second try was only prevented by scrambling defence and an excellent Martey tackle. Sadly for Sutton it was the most temporary stays of execution as the visitors swiftly recycled the ball and forced their way over the whitewash. Josh Twyford added the conversion for a 14-7 lead.

The first period had been an even affair but was ending with Sidcup in the ascendancy.The visitors next sortie into the host's 22 saw Sutton fullback Ciaran Mohr injure his shoulder to be replaced by the experienced Steve Munford who went to 9 as the incumbent Chris Ballard retreated to the open pastures of 15. The Black & Whites appeared to be navigating the half into a safe haven when they conceded a penalty whilst in possession. Josh Twyford stepped up to conclude the first half with a sweetly struck penalty to extend the visitor's advantage to 17-7.

Despite the lowly league status of the two teams it had been an entertaining first period with both sides carrying the ball with intent but being thwarted by efficient defences who tackled with a relish that reflected the significance of the fixture.

The match re-started and soon Josh Twyford was initiating an aerial bombardment that had proved beneficial in the billowing wind of the first half. This time Sidcup did not gain points from the sensible tactic. Both teams were aware of the significance of the first score in the half. Sutton's efforts were undermined as their line out temporarily malfunctioned and offered the visitors an easy escape. After ten minutes S&E scored through their most familiar method. The half-moon countenance of the Sidcup offender gave no hint of what he had been doing or, indeed,thinking but it was enough for Mr Tobias Whinney to award a penalty. Freddy Bunting collected three points for the Sutton cause as the scoreboard recorded 10-17. Within five minutes an excellent interception by the Black & Whites' lock Ewan McTaggart saw the hosts on the attack and awarded another penalty. Freddy Bunting reduced the deficit to 13-17.

The penalty pendulum swung back in the favour of the Kent men when a few minutes later the referee awarded them an opportunity to go for goal. Josh Twyford stepped up to the mark to make it 20-13 in Sidcup's favour as the game entered the final quarter. With a sense of symmetry the visitors were reduced to 14 men for a high tackle on Max Russell who had earlier enjoyed an unexpected ten minute rest. Soon after the Black & Whites had another penalty well within Freddy Bunting's range but the captain opted to kick to the corner. The gamble resulted in an unexpected bonus. The catch and drive was halted illegally and Sidcup were reduced to 13 men as Sir took his yellow card from his pocket once

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more. S&E opted for the 5-metre scrum but heroic defence on the line by the visitors saw them hold up the pack to be awarded the drop out from their line.

Before the crowd had time to digest if that might have been the turning point of the match the Surrey men were back on the attack. Chris Farrell found space out wide and burst into the 22and his perfectly timed pass was taken by flanker Rob Hegarty who squeezed in at the corner. A fabulous touchline conversion brought the scores level at 20-20 and the crowd to their feet. With Sidcup still not returned to their full compliment Sutton ran back the restart.

In such circumstances retaining possession is vital. S&E swung the ball from side to side and eventually Sidcup ran out of numbers. Once more it was the ubiquitous Farrell, on the left wing rather than the right this time,who was the provider as he passed to Robbie Martey on halfway. The winger showed all of his vast experience and class as he weaved his way to the line leaving would be tacklers rooted to the spot like potted plants. Freddy Bunting added the conversion as the two goals within five minutes had the Black & Whites leading 27-20.

The reinvigorated hosts went searching for a fourth try and a bonus point. Max Russell broke into the 22 but conceded a penalty on the deck. As the game entered time added on Sutton were awarded a penalty near halfway. Captain Bunting wisely took aim for goal with the reward of extending the advantage to beyond one score. He made it six successful strikes out of six and S&E led 30-20. Spirited Sidcup gathered themselves for a final assault and took advantage of the host's indiscipline to kick a penalty into the 22. Any anxiety for the Rugby Lane supporters was alleviated as their side turned over the ball and won a penalty. Shortly afterwards the referee concluded proceedings and the Black & Whites had a vital 30-20 win.

The hard fought contest was eventually decided by Sutton exploiting their numerical advantage when they played probably their best rugby of the season. In a fine effort by all concerned the hosts defence was much improved. The visitors contributed much to the match and gave no indication of being any worse than previous visitors this season despite their position in the league. Sutton & Epsom travel to the Richard Evans Memorial Playing Fields next Saturday 11th November to take on London Cornish. Please note that the game will kick off at 2:15 pm and for those spectators who enjoy indulging in the post-match reflections these will take place at Roehampton Cricket Club.

Sutton & Epsom:

Ciaran Mohr, Robbie Martey, Lawrence Elliott, Freddy Bunting ©, Max Russell, Gareth O'Brien,Chris Ballard, Callum Gibson, Chris Farrell, Alex Mount, Ewan McTaggart, Josh Glanville, GeorgeLondon, Josh Pulvirenti & Matt Whitaker.

Replacements: Tom Boaden, Rob Hegarty & Steve Munford.

Sidcup:

Charlie Pooley, Luke Sheridan, Dan Masters , Zak Jones, Louis Keeley, Josh Twyford, Sam Leamon,Joe Brady, Harry Large, Teddy Gibbons, Jack Dutton ©, Steve Ecans, Tom Epps, Liam Healey &Jon West.

Replacements: Jon Fordham, Harry Gibbons & George Bird.

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