



Sutton & Epsom beaten by Gravesend as yellow card proves decisive

1 February 2026



Sutton and Epsom RFC v Gravesend Saturday 31st January. On an autumnal October afternoon Sutton & Epsom defeated Gravesend 29-12 at the Rectory Field. That victory in Round 6 sent them to the summit of Regional 2 South East. However, the current form of S&E has challenged the Podsnapian assumption of reaching the promotion play-offs. A season that started with great expectations has fallen on hard times.

In Round 16 Sutton slipped to another defeat, 37-26, as Gravesend leapfrogged them in the table to seventh place.

Saturday's fixture gave a debut to Tom Williams in the Number 9 shirt and he became the fifth starting scrum-half of the campaign. The returning Huie joined Duey on the bench but sadly a Louis could not be found. Recently gales, galoshes and gamps have been in vogue but the weather was blessedly more benign. Having been denied league action the previous weekend, the crowd were abuzz with anticipation as Gravesend kicked off the match.

It was an inauspicious start for the hosts as they immediately conceded a penalty and faced a Gravesend line-out five metres from their line with barely a minute on the clock. The initial drive was halted but another penalty followed. Despite stoic defence, the Kent team scored through the forwards with a sense of inevitability. The challenging conversion drifted wide as the visitors led 5-0.

From the restart indecision from Gravesend almost allowed Adam Bibby to gain possession. It was the set scrum that raised the spirits of the Rugby Lane crowd. From the opposition put-in, the home pack sent the Rectory Field forwards into disarray. A quick tap penalty and a kick ahead by Tom Lennard nestled a yard from the line and Adam Bibby dragged the defender over for a five-metre scrum.

Sutton won the ball but fine defence halted Bunting and then Lennie. The visitors had relief of sorts with their put-in under their posts, but the Black & White pack turned them over again. A snipe by Tom Williams was followed by Ewan McTaggart stretching out to score. Freddy Bunting added the easy conversion as S&E took a 7-5 lead after a dozen minutes.

If the Sutton scrum was excellence personified, the line-out was at the other end of the spectrum as the match entered a *déjà vu* phase. S&E line-out lost, Gravesend kick, and Kyren Ghumra ran it back to great effect. After two episodes of this entertaining drama, conveniently aired on either side of the paddock near halfway, Sutton scored their second try.

Adam Bibby made a stunning break from the middle of the park and entered the opposition 22. With his centre partner Freddy Bunting in support, he supplied a timely pass for his captain to score. Freddy Bunting added the extras to extend the lead to 14-5 at the end of the first quarter.

At last S&E won a line-out and it was worth the wait as the forwards drove at least 20 metres towards the line and were unlucky to concede a penalty. A moment of butterfingers from an unnamed source thwarted the hosts' next promising attack as Sutton dominated the territorial battle.

Gravesend exited their half in sensational fashion. Ben Hope, playing on the wing, collected the ball near touch by his 22 and set off. Breaking tackles, brushing aside defenders and gathering speed, he scored an outstanding try in the corner. The touchline conversion failed as the visitors narrowed the gap to 14-10.

The next significant moment was unfortunately a lengthy delay as the sawbones attended to the injured Samraj Chahal. Gravesend lost their totemic forward, replaced by Chris Brady, the sole representative of the Brady bunch on the afternoon as his brother had just returned from Dubai.

The Kent team responded to adversity by breaking free and going on the rampage into the Sutton half, with hooker Stan Dadson leading the charge. The visitors ended the first half in the ascendancy as they searched for the lead. They had to be content with a penalty, winger Josh Barnes obliging with the three points as the referee concluded the half with Sutton narrowly ahead, 14-13.

An entertaining first period promised a second half rich in tries and tension. Freddy Bunting resumed the action with Gravesend attacking the clubhouse end. S&E made a promising start with Adam Bibby making another superb break but on this occasion there was no support on hand to take the glory.

Referee Hampshire had already ominously called Captain Bunting over for a chat late in the first half, foreshadowing Sutton's walk along the disciplinary tightrope. With nearly ten minutes of the second period played and Gravesend on the



Sutton line, the visitors were awarded a penalty. Lock Josh Glanville received a yellow card and the hosts were reduced to 14 men.

The Rectory Field men opted for the three points, Josh Barnes edging Gravesend into a 16-14 lead. The ten-minute yellow-card period proved the turning point. Gravesend exploited their numerical advantage with admirable skill and ruthless pragmatism.

From a scrum 30 metres from the Sutton line, Ben Kite kicked perfectly to Josh Barnes on the wing, who gathered and sauntered in for the try. He added the conversion to stretch the lead to 23-14. A couple of minutes later fellow wing Ben Hope added his second and Gravesend's bonus-point try. Barnes again converted, extending the lead to 30-14. The yellow card had cost Sutton 17 points by the time Glanville returned.

To their credit, the Black & Whites responded swiftly. The improving line-out secured possession and initiated another relentless catch-and-drive. This time there was no intervention as hooker Sam Lennie forced his way over. Freddy Bunting bisected the uprights to pull it back to 21-30.

Shortly after, the Rugby Lane faithful were left flummoxed by suicidal Sutton play. Nine points adrift with a quarter of an hour to go, a long miss-pass was sent out from their own 22. Fortunately the interception was not run in under the posts, and S&E gained relief through a penalty a few phases later. Sanity restored, the contest returned to an arm-wrestle around halfway.

Gravesend's fifth and final try was initiated by a superb clear-out at the ruck by prop Harry Brooker. A speculative kick ahead found space in the S&E 22 and visiting full-back Ben Stelfox took advantage of inadequate cover to score. Barnes' conversion made it 37-21 and took his personal tally to 17 points.

With six minutes left the contest was over and Sutton hunted the consolation of a bonus point. The Black & Whites struggled to penetrate a robust Gravesend defence, but benefitted from the punitive side of Mr Hampshire's nature as yellow cards were issued in quick succession to Stan Dadson and Les Falefatu in time added on.

Playing against 13 men, Sutton accepted the invitation. From a tap penalty Eric Duey powered over for the bonus-point try. At the final whistle, contrasting emotions were clear as Gravesend's players, fuelled by victory, recovered quickly, while Sutton's men laboured under the lactic acid of defeat. Gravesend had deservedly won 37-26.

In retrospect, the yellow card that Gravesend exploited so ruthlessly put paid to Sutton's hopes. The balance between devil-may-care ambition and league pragmatism remains elusive. Sutton's scrum was magnificent, the line-out frustratingly sporadic and the defence too porous. Gravesend's organisation and physicality blunted Sutton's width, while Ben Hope stood at the forefront of an impressive attacking display.

Supporters and players mingled in traditional fashion in the clubhouse, certainly not a bleak house, as the Kent side were buoyed by a sizeable travelling support rewarded with a fine victory.

With a deferential tug to Boz from a formerly tousled forelock, one might exclaim "what the Dickens" on noting yet another gap in the league calendar next Saturday. The season resumes on Valentine's Day as Sutton venture to Balmoral Avenue to face Beckenham, whom they narrowly defeated 22-19 earlier in the season at Rugby Lane.

Sutton & Epsom:

Ghumra, Symonds, Bibby, Bunting ©, Scott, Lennard, Williams, Johnson, Lennie, Boaden, McTaggart, Glanville, Tame, Jones & Hegarty.

Reps: Howes, Duey & Huie.

Gravesend:

Stelfox, Barnes, Filmer, Sims, Hope, Kite, Warren, Brooker, Dadson, Shorter, Bird, Falefatu, Bailey, Chahal © & Money.

Reps: Alderson, Brady & Harris.

John Croysdill

Rugby action Epsom against Gravesend credit Robin Kennedy -from a previous fixture