

Sutton & Epsom Fall Short in Entertaining 10-Try Battle at Rugby Lane

2 March 2026



Sutton & Epsom RFC 27 Battersea Ironsides 38. Saturday 28th February.

With hindsight being, as ever, twenty-twenty vision, the defeat of the Black & Whites at Garratt Green has been viewed by some as the turning point of the season for Sutton & Epsom. A 15-point lead with seven minutes to go, depending on your loyalties, was either thrown away through incompetence or overturned by spirited brilliance as the Ironsides triumphed 24-22. Since that November afternoon the fortunes of the Rugby Lane team have headed in a southerly direction. Saturday's fixture saw Sutton & Epsom, in seventh, take on Battersea, in sixth, with a solitary point separating them. The visitors took the spoils in an entertaining 38-27 win to gain a bonus point victory that saw them rise into the play-off positions.

For the Black & Whites there was minimal disruption to the squad but welcome returns for Ewan McTaggart after his international adventures and Kyren Ghumra on the wing. There was an inauspicious start to the game for the hosts, with echoes of the match in November, as the kick-off went out on the full to initiate a scrum. Battersea immediately showed their attacking intent with a delightful chip and gather by Cameron Baker but he was met by a perfectly timed tackle from Gareth O'Brien. It started an opening quarter full of attacking intent by both teams that was met by sterling defence that thwarted fleeting moments of try-scoring potential for both XVs. On the quarter hour there was an unfortunate incident as Amir Sultan rose skywards to take a clearance kick. Kyren Ghumra slipped as he approached and the collision ended with a heavy fall. Amir Sultan, after a lengthy delay, had to be helped from the field to sympathetic and universal applause from the sizeable crowd. He was replaced by Lewis Waters and the accidental nature of the incident meant that Monsieur Brognard did not issue a card.

At the start of the second quarter Sutton & Epsom enjoyed their best period of play. In rapid succession they had opportunities. The first saw Ewan McTaggart and Jack Howes combine and the second was initiated by a Gareth O'Brien counter. Both ended in turnovers that were the result of insufficient support and swarming Battersea defence. The Rugby Lane supporters had the consolation of a Tom Lennard penalty after 25 minutes that put Sutton & Epsom into a 3-0 lead. The Ironsides responded in the perfect manner but in an unexpected way. A multi-phase attack was brought back for a penalty that was kicked to the corner. Sutton & Epsom stole the 5-metre line and cleared superbly to halfway. The visitors took a quick ball but with only two men available to counter it should not have been a problem. However, a surging run tore Sutton & Epsom apart and replacement Lewis Waters was in support for the try. Cameron Baker's conversion drifted wide but Battersea led 5-3.

The game continued to demonstrate the scoring potential of both teams as well as the defensive prowess of players frustrating opponents with timely turnovers. Sutton & Epsom hopes were raised, as so often is the case, with a robust run from hooker Sam Lennie. A man who relishes physical contact and has a deceptive turn of speed he broke free to advance to 10 metres out. Credit to the scrambling defence of the Battersea team that they reorganised and halted the hosts a couple of phases later. Unfortunately for Sutton & Epsom there was no silver lining to this cloud, as the subsequent penalty failed to add the three points.

As the first period entered time added on the visitors added another try from a stunning break. This time it was scrum-half Dan Thomas with a scintillating surge that beat the initial tacklers and found the wide-open spaces. His half-back partner Cameron Baker was on hand to provide the coup de grâce much to the delight of not only his charming parents but also the many travelling Ironsides fans who added much to a wonderful atmosphere at Rugby Lane. Baker added the simple conversion for a 12-3 lead. The half ended in frustration for Sutton & Epsom. Adam Bibby sensationally took the restart and Sutton & Epsom camped in the 22. A penalty was kicked to the corner, the lineout secured and replacement Dan Jones went close. The ball was recycled and Tom Lennard was enveloped and kept vertical for the turnover that concluded the first period. Battersea led 12-3 but no one doubted the potential for more scores in the second half.

Sutton & Epsom began the second half with relish spreading it wide with Kyren Ghumra making yards. The first scrum of the half saw a powerful drive and a penalty to the hosts. The expected kick to the corner and attacking lineout followed. Though they secured the ball Battersea stood strong and got a relieving scrum. Flanker Arboine, as he did all afternoon, carried to great effect and the Ironsides cleared. However, it was Sutton & Epsom's turn to counter for success. An arcing run by Lennie fed Ghumra and the winger, with plenty to do, sped down the line to score. The Black & Whites trailed 8-12. The visitors were stung into action. Awarded a penalty, they took the quick tap and moments later were agonisingly close to a try as wonderful Sutton & Epsom defence held them up over the line. Five minutes later the next Battersea sortie to the Sutton & Epsom 22 saw the visitors secure their third try. A catch and drive was controlled by the pack and Raph

Arboine was on hand to score from close range. The Baker boot added the extras for a 19-8 lead.

Ten minutes later the whole nature of the fixture changed as Sutton & Epsom scored twice in five magnificent minutes of rugby. The first came from a Joe Lovatt kick on halfway as a favourable bounce ended in home hands. Dan Jones accelerated into the open spaces and passed to the fleet-footed Captain Bunting who ran in the try. Tom Lennard added the simple conversion. Rejuvenated by this try Sutton & Epsom were on the attack once more. Their vastly improved lineout secured the ball to initiate a formidable drive that resulted in a try for Sam Lennie. Despite the Lennard conversion from touch rebounding back off the upright the Black & Whites led 20-19.

The men in green replied as if insulted by the hosts' effrontery at taking the lead. They stepped up a gear and immediately put Sutton & Epsom under the cosh. Despite heroic defence near their line Sutton & Epsom succumbed as Charlie Craig took the glory and Battersea regained the lead at 24-20. Earlier it had been a relief to see Amir Sultan return to the game after his injury. However, his return now took on Lazarus-like dimensions. Tom Lennard hoisted a cross-field bomb with the intention of exposing the opposition on halfway. This time the result for the soaring Sultan was much happier. A wonderful airborne take was followed by a sprint from halfway that left the cover a very distant second. Cameron Baker calmly converted for 31-20. Five minutes later the 'Sultan of Swerve' had the ball again and finished with aplomb from 20 out. With the conversion added and the scoreboard reading 38-20 the contest was over.

Sutton & Epsom still had bonus points to chase and to their credit hit back with gusto to score in time added on. Once again they were indebted to their clinical lineout and the tireless endeavour of their pack. This time it was Dan Jones who popped in under the posts. Tom Lennard converted to conclude the scoring as Sutton & Epsom lost 38-27 but gained a vital bonus point. No doubt the coaches will have been frustrated by the errors but it was a thrilling spectacle for the crowd who enjoyed 10 tries. Battersea punished Sutton & Epsom errors with ruthless efficiency and seemed to have that extra gear when required. For the hosts the lineout was transformed, the forwards were formidable in the set-piece and, encouragingly, the supporters enjoyed players running onto the ball from depth with pace. Finally, credit to Cyril Brognard whose officiating enhanced the game with excellent communication, a desire to create a flowing game and superb positioning for those tries from close range.

Next Saturday Sutton & Epsom venture to the Coolhurst Ground to play Horsham RFC for the first time in a league encounter. The Sussex club, having been relegated with Brighton last season, are keen to bounce back to Regional 1 South East at the first opportunity and will be out to secure their place in the play-offs. Meanwhile Battersea host Beckenham with both clubs still in contention for extending their season.

Sutton & Epsom: O'Brien, Scott, Bibby, Bunting ©, Ghumra, Lennard, Lovatt, Boaden, Howes, Lennie, McTaggart, Glanville, Pulvirenti, Rea & Hegarty. Reps: Jones, Duey & Tame.

Battersea Ironsides: Diamond, Sultan, Bourke, Campbell, Craig, Baker, Thomas, Borup, Chetwynd-Milo, Chetwynd, Kemp, Wharton, Arboine, Chitan © & Charles. Reps: Jones, McCleary & Waters.

John Croysdill

Photo credit: Robin Kennedy