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Sutton & Epsom RFC Hold On For A Vital Victory

8 January 2023

Sutton & Epsom 13 – Bournemouth 8. 7th January. The combination of seasonally inclement winter weather and the Yuletide celebrations created a 5-week lay off from all league rugby for the Sutton & Epsom Rugby squad. This welcome respite from the ravages of an underwhelming campaign does have the proviso that the S&E is now forced to play on ten consecutive Saturdays to complete their fixture list. The Black &Whites gained revenge on Bournemouth, who had narrowly defeated them 28-25 at Chapel Gate in October, with a hard fought 13-8 success. Sutton & Epsom gave a debut to Jamie Flatley at 10 and Kieran Finney, back from university, made his first start of the season to become representative Number 44 for S&E this campaign.

There was also a welcome return to the colours from Messrs Bunting and Martey. The miserable weather was probably appropriate for two teams at the wrong end of the table who were desperately slugging it out for a victory. Bournemouth kicked off and Sutton had the advantage of a sporadic wind. The visitors dominated the opening exchanges and encamped in the S&E 22. A sweeping move to the left hand corner saw the hosts scrambling in defence and despite Kyren Ghumra's tackle Ryan Morrell was on hand to score. Grant Hancox's conversion from the flank slid wide but the Lions led 5-0 after an impressive opening ten minutes. From the restart Sutton were awarded a penalty and had an opportunity to open their account. Freddy Bunting thumped over the penalty and Sutton trailed by 3-5. Moments later the returning centre was addressing a more challenging kick from 45 metres but despite his best endeavours he failed to bisect the uprights.

In the opening quarter it appeared that the Bunting boot was the only Sutton & Epsom currency as they had enjoyed precious little possession. Then a startling break by Jamie Flatley had the crowd on their feet as they enjoyed S&E's best passage of play. Five minutes later Number 8Tom Brooker intercepted a wayward pass on halfway, leaving all the chasers in his wake he strode home to score. Freddy Bunting chipped over the conversion and the Rugby Lane team led 10-5.Despite the scoreboard the men from Chapel Gate were enjoying the majority of the territory and possession. They made light of the slippery conditions and spun the ball wide at every opportunity in an effort to replicate their earlier success. The Sutton & Epsom defence was dogged and organised and the visitors were denied any further opportunity to add to their account in the first period. Indeed it was S&E who extended their lead on the half hour via the good offices of Freddy Bunting who added another penalty for 13-5.

For the remainder of the half the Surrey men grew in confidence and began to enjoy more possession. Centre Antony Fitch, with no malicious intent, received a harsh yellow card fora high tackle on Robbie Martey and the visitors were reduced to 14 men. Moments later the referee brought proceedings to a halt with Sutton 13-5 ahead at the interval.Sutton started the second half superbly as they tried to take advantage of their numerical superiority. A powerful scrum sent their opponents into reverse and won a penalty. From the line out Tom Brooker carried powerfully to the line.

Numerous phases and carries continued to inch the ball towards the posts. Just when a try appeared to be inevitable a thunderous Bournemouth tackle dislodged the ball and the visitors were awarded a scrum. Their sterling defence was rewarded as they cleared their lines and they returned to their full compliment with Sutton having failed to score a single point against the 14 men.On the hour came a moment of great controversy. Jamie See threaded a wonderful kick behind the Bournemouth defence that came to rest a couple of yards from the line.Robbie Martey raced forward and intelligently slid in to gather the ball and the cover defence instinctively dived on the winger on the deck. Robbie Martey regained his footing and scored. However, the referee awarded a penalty to Bournemouth.

The visitors refreshed their pack with their bench and the fresh legs made a significant impact in the final quarter. It was the Lions pack who now had the ascendancy at the set scrum and from that sturdy foundation they set about reducing the deficit. The relentless pressure was rewarded with a penalty on the Sutton 22 with ten minutes remaining. Sensibly Grant Hancox stepped up to knock over the kick to make it 13-8 and put Bournemouth within a score. The closing stages of the match were to be anything but a relaxing affair for the Sutton faithful. In time added on the Black & Whites were showing commendable game management as the forwards kept the ball at close quarters. Then disaster struck as an isolated forward conceded a penalty. It was kicked to the corner and the Dorset men had a 5-metre line out. The visitors were repelled but the hosts conceded another penalty. After a lengthy discussion they opted for the tap penalty.

Their followed a relentlessly slow advance towards the Sutton & Epsom posts. Inch by inch the Bournemouth pack moved towards glory and an inevitable try. It was all hands to the pump for the Black & Whites as they threw themselves desperately into every tackle and veteran centre Jamie See stole the ball. A jubilant Sutton player kicked the ball towards the 2 nd XV pitch and the referee blew his whistle to conclude the afternoon's entertainment. Victory by 13-8 was essential for S&E if they were to entertain hopes of survival.

The Black & Whites will hope the nature of this victory will create the necessary confidence and momentum to ignite their campaign. Jamie Flatley made an impressive debut at 10 playing with an assured quality and demonstrating dazzling footwork that bodes well for the future. The Sutton & Epsom pack was outstanding on an afternoon made for attritional rugby. Bournemouth matched Sutton & Epsom blow for blow and could have taken the honours at the death in a contest both sides needed to win and the visitors failed by the narrowest of margins.

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Next Saturday, with sincere apologies to the rest of Sutton & Epsom's esteemed opponents, is a red-letter day as the club travels to the famous Old Deer Park to play the prestigious London Welsh. It will be the third time Sutton & Epsom have visited the Exiles and this will be the third location enjoyed but the first time in 120 years that they have had the privilege. In October the two teams fought to a standstill beneath a splendid rainbow and it was honours even with a 15-15 draw that was highly entertaining.

Sutton & Epsom

Sam Hurley, Robbie Martey, Freddy Bunting, Jamie See, Kyren Ghumra, Jamie Flatley,Austin Bell, Tom Boaden, Alex Mount, Will Lloyd, George Drye, Josh Glanville, Chris Farrell©, Rob Hegarty & Tom Brooker.

Replacements: Kieran Finney. Not Used: Jack Howes, & Ciaran Mohr.

Bournemouth

Ryan Morrell, Ash Taylor, Adam Higgins, Antony Fitch, Oli Granger-Williams, Ben Meaden,Grant Hancox, Alan Manning Conrad Carkeet, Gianluca Firetto, Matt Warwick, ConnorMcCaffrey, Ben Kimber, Ciaran Smyth & Joe Desmond.

Replacements: (all used) Jordie Wayman, Tom Napier & Ben Goodall.

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