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Sutton & Epsom squeeze home in Hurlingham thriller

28 September 2026

Hammersmith & Fulham 33 Sutton & Epsom 35

It was a belated welcome to the 2026/27 Regional 2 South East campaign at Hurlingham Park on Saturday.

The RFU had wisely delayed the start of hostilities as the country recalled the summer of ’76 and the drought had impacted pitches. No doubt RFU committees, puffing on their Montecristo No. 2s, paraphrased Lieutenant Colonel Bill Kilgore’s immortal words with relief: “I love the smell of petrichor in the morning.”

The Black & Whites’ season began with a first-ever league encounter against Hammersmith & Fulham. The honour of winning the inaugural edition of the “Ampersand Cup” went to S&E as they narrowly defeated H&F 35-33, despite being outscored five tries to four.

There was a solitary debutant for S&E, with James Beck, formerly of CS Stags, starting in the front row. In contrast, it was a red-letter day for Sutton prop Thomas Boaden, who made his 100th First XV league appearance off the bench.

Unfortunately H&F president Jason Leonard – a fellow prop who achieved a rather more notable century of caps – was not in attendance to offer his congratulations.

The hosts made a host of changes from their final game of the previous season, with ten alterations, but prospective debutant Jack Coman was unfortunately sidelined with a calf injury in the warm-up.

There was a minute’s silence before the match to remember Bob Lawless, the former Middlesex president who sadly passed away in June.

Referee Cyril Brognard’s whistle initiated proceedings as Sutton’s Frederick Bunting kicked off the campaign.

The Black & Whites were on the board almost instantly. The enveloping frame of Euan McTaggart blocked a box kick and the ball stayed in play. A couple of passes later scrum-half Euan Findlay was on hand to touch down in the corner.

The Bunting boot added the extras for a 7-0 S&E lead.

Maintaining the early momentum, a high tackle a few minutes later offered the visitors a chance to increase their advantage. It was no surprise to regular S&E followers that the easy three points were shunned in favour of a kick to the corner.

H&F stood firm and there was no further addition to the score.

After a dozen minutes came the unfortunate sight of debutant James Beck leaving the field with an Achilles injury that has ended his season.

Play resumed with another Sutton penalty, converted by Frederick Bunting – much to the relief of the travelling onlookers – to extend Sutton’s advantage to ten points. Thomas Boaden entered the fray for his 100th cap far earlier than he had expected.

Hammersmith now showed they had plenty to offer with a devastating attack that left the Sutton defence in tatters. However, they were thwarted a yard from glory as S&E secured not only a turnover but also a relieving penalty.

That disappointment was soon replaced by joy as H&F opened their account. A clearance kick bounced back towards the hosts and two timely prods saw the ball roll over the try line, where Ben Morris won the race to score.

Geoff Mahon’s excellent strike from the flank made it 10-7 to Sutton.

The visitors returned to attacking mode with the dazzling feet of Adam Bibby and a powerful arcing run by captain Hegarty bringing them to the line.

This time it was Sutton’s turn to be frustrated by conceding a penalty when so close to success, but like the hosts they soon had another chance.

Flanker Joshua Rea made the initial break before a sidestep and dummy from Gareth O’Brien cut through the backs, enabling him to pass to hooker Samuel Lennie, who cantered home.

The conversion narrowly missed as the Black & Whites led 15-7 on the half-hour.

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Hammersmith & Fulham bounced back instantly to send the Hurlingham Park supporters into raptures.

The score was a fraternal affair as full-back Douglas Russell cleared and brother Tim skilfully claimed the bouncing ball before speeding upfield and passing back to Douglas, who ran it home.

Geoff Mahon bisected the uprights to reduce the deficit to 15-14.

The remainder of the half offered no further scoring opportunities, but on the evidence of the opening 40 minutes the crowd could look forward to plenty more entertainment.

Sutton took shelter in the shade to ponder their strategy for the remainder of the contest.

Sutton made another rapid start with a sensational score soon after the restart.

Daniel Jones carried the ball out of defence before being enveloped by H&F players, but he managed to pass to fellow flanker Joshua Rea.

To say the Kiwi had plenty to do would have been an understatement, but he covered more than 60 metres to score despite tacklers being in hot pursuit for virtually every stride.

Bunting converted as nonchalantly as a smoker flicking ash from a cigarette and S&E led 22-14.

Five minutes later the Rugby Lane followers were cheering the bonus-point try.

Daniel Jones made another telling break and found the ideal man in support, Euan McTaggart, who used every inch of his considerable reach to place the ball over the line.

The metronomic Bunting made it 29-14.

Those two scores were not, however, the precursor to a relaxing romp for the Black & Whites, as H&F replied instantly.

It was a score that will have had defensive coaches muttering profanities when reviewing the match afterwards.

S&E were awarded a penalty but failed to find touch. At least the ball remained deep inside the Hammersmith 22.

The hosts' adventure was then aided by poor tackling. A speculative kick ahead, recalling the fortunate bounce for H&F's first try, led to a diving attempt to catch the ball.

It was spilled forward and hacked on to within five metres. Quickly recycled, it went to fly-half Ed Shand, whose stylish dummy enabled him to stroll in for the try.

Geoff Mahon made the score 29-21 and put his side firmly back into the contest.

With Benjamin Tame and Joseph Lovatt coming off the bench, Sutton hoped fresh legs on a sweltering afternoon would provide the necessary vitality to extend their advantage.

With a keen eye on the scoreboard, they sensibly took advantage of Frederick Bunting's kicking talent. He added a penalty at the start of the final quarter to make it 32-21.

A minute later the Middlesex men were offered a kickable penalty but sought premium points by kicking to the corner.

Their bravery was rewarded as they secured the lineout ball and advanced relentlessly.

It was left to scrum-half Geoff Mahon to score. The number nine then made it four conversions from four as H&F closed to within a score at 32-28.

The game continued with mounting tension as both sides tenaciously scrapped over every ball, each seeking the decisive blow.

As the match entered added time Sutton fly-half Thomas Lennard made the significant intervention. His arcing break saw him scuttling into the opposition 22 and the scrambling defence conceded a penalty directly in front of the uprights.

There was no hesitation in choosing to kick and, as expected, Frederick Bunting did the necessary for 35-28 as referee Brognard announced that three minutes remained.

For experienced watchers of the Black & Whites, extreme anxiety immediately set in as they watched the restart descend.

Their fears were realised when the hosts were awarded a penalty.

With a sense of inevitability Sutton found themselves defending a lineout ten metres from their own line.

H&F won the ball and their forwards did superbly to patiently advance towards the line before the final surge.

Referee Brognard, perfectly positioned on one knee, raised his arm aloft to signal the try.

The exultant home crowd soon fell silent as Geoff Mahon stepped up to take the final kick of the game from the extremities.

It fell short.

Sutton had survived to win 35-33.

Sutton & Epsom were good value for their victory, with the lineout and set scrum impressing throughout. Joshua Rea produced perhaps his finest performance in a Sutton shirt and S&E wisely exploited the Bunting boot to secure a winning start.

Hammersmith & Fulham showed themselves to be an excellent addition to the league, both on and off the field, as all concerned retired to The Temperance to enjoy the traditional rugby fellowship after the game.

Next Saturday Rugby Lane hosts Battersea Ironsides for Sutton & Epsom's first home league fixture of the season.

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

Replacements: Boaden, Tame, Lovatt.

Hammersmith & Fulham

Russell D, Russell T, MacLeod, Louis, Scott, Shand, Mahon, Rogan, McCarthy, Poulton, Lang, Rivett, Morris, Perry, Proctor.

Replacements: Cowls, Chamberlain, Thompson.

John Croysdill

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Image: non-specific S&E in rugby action

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