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Sutton & Epsom v Sidcup – Rugby match report

20 January 2026



Sutton and Epsom 12 Sidcup 28. Saturday 17th January.

Sidcup arrived at Rugby Lane buoyed by the wheels wobbling on the Brighton bandwagon. Back-to-back defeats either side of the festive break by their south-coast rivals had left the Crescent Farm side just one point off the top. For Sutton and Epsom, their top-five position – equating to entry into the play-off rounds – was under threat.

Before kick-off, the Black and Whites had to digest the unpalatable news that Old Colfeians had won 22-19 at Beckenham under the lights on Friday night, pushing Sutton and Epsom down to sixth place. In a keenly contested encounter at Rugby Lane, Sidcup came from behind to win 28-12 and, crucially, scored their fourth try on the final play to secure a bonus point that lifted them into pole position by virtue of a vastly superior points difference.

The recent number-nine hiatus for Sutton and Epsom was resolved with Euan Findlay making his league debut. There was also a welcome return for “the prodigal son” Josh Glanville, pulling on the colours for his first outing of the campaign. On the bench, crowd favourite Richard Madadangoma made his first appearance of the season. All Sutton and Epsom’s comings and goings paled into insignificance, however, alongside Sidcup prop Sam Carmen, who was making his 300th league appearance.

Before kick-off there was a tribute to Ben Searle, a member of the Sutton and Epsom physio team who tragically passed away following a battle with cancer. After the applause, Freddy Bunting set the game in motion with Sutton and Epsom attacking the clubhouse end.

Sutton and Epsom were hoping to reprise the outstanding performance that defeated Sidcup at Crescent Farm last season. The secret then was a fast start built on high-tempo rugby, rapid recycling and effective use of width. To their credit, the hosts put that plan into effect, dominating territory and possession in the opening exchanges.

Never has the old chestnut of taking penalty points reverberated louder around the stand. Four kickable penalties in front of the posts were declined in the first half. This was particularly notable given Sidcup possess the league’s best defensive record, conceding only 16 points per game. Yet this approach has been consistent all season, with Sutton and Epsom having converted only three penalty kicks despite amassing 460 points.

After a scoreless first quarter in which the Sidcup defence repeatedly repelled attacks that came agonisingly close, Sutton and Epsom finally broke through in the 25th minute. A sweeping move from halfway saw Tom Lennard break free on an inside line, Josh Rea time his support perfectly, and debutant Findlay finish with aplomb. Freddy Bunting’s conversion struck the upright, but the hosts led 5-0.

Ten minutes later Sidcup entered the Sutton and Epsom 22 for the first time and immediately made it count. A penalty kicked to the corner set up an attacking line-out and, after initial resistance, hooker Harry Large forced his way over. Josh Twyford converted impressively from the touchline to give the visitors a 7-5 lead.

Sutton and Epsom responded superbly and regained the lead before the interval. Sam Lennie made a trademark bulldozing break through midfield, Josh Rea again played a pivotal role, and Michael Bennion arrived at pace to sprint in from outside the 22 and score under the posts. Bunting added the extras to make it 12-7.

As first-half stoppage time approached, Sidcup produced their best passage of play, pressing hard for a second score. After excellent continuity, it appeared a try had been scored in the corner, but the ball was lost just short of the line. The half ended with the visitors in the ascendancy, though Sutton and Epsom had played some of their best rugby for a long while. Only time would tell whether they would rue not turning that dominance into more points.

Alex Lambe’s whistle began a finely balanced second half. Sidcup opened with a couple of uncharacteristic errors, but these proved brief. Five minutes in, Ben Stokes cut through the Sutton and Epsom defence, only to be denied by a timely intervention from Findlay. Shortly afterwards the visitors struck again. A perfectly timed pass on halfway released winger Seb Ellison, who kicked ahead, chased and gathered just ahead of the cover. Twyford converted from wide to put Sidcup 14-12 ahead.

Momentum now belonged to the men from Crescent Farm. Sidcup dominated possession, and Sutton and Epsom’s defensive resolve was tested relentlessly. That resistance held until the final quarter, when sustained pressure told. Captain Louis Keeley exploited the blindside, burst down the touchline and cut inside to score. Twyford’s conversion stretched the lead to 21-12.

As Sidcup turned the screw, Sutton and Epsom were further hampered by the injury-enforced departure of Josh Rea, who had produced an outstanding performance. The visitors hunted the bonus point, but the Rugby Lane men stood firm,

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holding Sidcup up over the line with ten minutes remaining.

With five minutes to play, Sutton and Epsom survived a stunning break, scrambling heroically before winning a relieving penalty. The match seemed set to conclude without bonus points. In the dying moments, however, an arm interfered with a Sutton and Epsom line-out jumper and a penalty was awarded. The Black and Whites opted for a long-range kick from near the touchline. Success would have earned a deserved bonus point. The kick drifted wide.

Sidcup counter-attacked from deep, moving the ball fluently before a long kick and eager chase forced a turnover. Hooker Harry Large, again in excellent support, gathered and ran in under the posts. Twyford added the conversion to complete a 28-12 victory and send Sidcup top of the league.

Sidcup's second-half defence proved rather more durable than the Maginot Line, and Sutton and Epsom were unable to find a way through. Yet the hosts made their opponents work until the final seconds, and the first-half performance in particular should be the benchmark for the remainder of the season.

The league programme now pauses, with hostilities resuming on 31 January when Sutton and Epsom welcome Gravesend to Rugby Lane, having beaten them 29-12 away in October. High-flying Sidcup host local rivals Beckenham as they continue their push for promotion.

John Croysdill

Sutton and Epsom:
Bennion, Scott, Bibby, Bunting ©, Symonds, Lennard, O'Brien, Johnson, Lennie, Boaden, McTaggart, Duey, Rea, Jones, Hegarty.
Replacements: Howes, Glanville, Madadangoma.

Sidcup:
Twyford, Ellison, Stokes, Smith, Keeley ©, Ubee, Ibrahim, Conlon, Large, Carmen, Stock, Romp, Koung, Healey, Caple.
Replacements: Watson, Knock, McMahon.

Photo – from previous fixture. Robin Kennedy

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