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Sweet success for Sutton and Epsom Rugby

16 February 2026



Beckenham 14 Sutton & Epsom 22. Saturday 14th February.

Last October a Tom Lennard penalty with the last kick of the game secured a Sutton and Epsom 22-19 win. A Beckenham side hit by injuries, with a George Bunton brace and the traditional Rimarni Richards try, had taken the game to the wire. Not quite as rare as the sighting of a fluffy-backed tit-babbler at Rugby Lane but the Black & Whites crucially won a second half. With the season meandering intermittently to a conclusion both clubs might be considering whether they will be involved in the inaugural play-offs. For the upwardly mobile fourth-placed hosts there is the possibility of embarking on four outings. Pessimists from the off-colour visitors might be fearing the 25th April match to decide who remains in Regional 2 South East. On Saturday, lightning struck twice as, once again, S&E won a second half and secured a vital 22-14 win to steady their nerves.

The Black & Whites were without their German international lock, Ewan McTaggart, as ‘Die Schwarzen Adler’ (‘The Black Eagles’) were in Portugal for the next round of the European Rugby Championship. Such inconveniences are most familiar to Beckenham with their Caribbean connections. For followers of rugby at this level it is a familiar tale of woe that injuries are never spread evenly from 1 to 15. This season for Sutton and Epsom the Number 9 shirt has been a hexed item of clothing and this week Sam Lovatt became the sixth player to don the cursed shroud. However, there was happier news with the return of Josh Pulvirenti to the colours. The Balmoral Avenue Brigade are no stranger to injuries and have done remarkably well this campaign despite regular absences of key personnel and once more they took the field minus stalwart players.

A year ago Beckenham lost their 2nd XV captain Graham Murray in a tragic traffic accident and there was a minute’s applause in his honour before the kick off. Considering the recent weather, that might make a modern Darwin predict webbed feet for humans in the future, Balmoral Avenue was blessed with not only sunshine but a playing surface that was a credit to the hardworking ground staff. Freddy Bunting kicked off for Sutton and Epsom but it was Beckenham who seized the initiative. The home team dominated the opening 15 minutes playing at a high tempo they threatened to run away with the game. An ominous first scrum saw Sutton and Epsom shunted back on their own ball. The combination of desperate defence and inopportune handling near the line saw S&E survive until scrum half Jack Gurney opened the scoring from close range following mounting pressure. Josh Burke added the conversion for a worthy 7-0 lead.

This was not a case of the floodgates opening but, to the contrary, the visitors replied at once. A surging burst from Gareth O’Brien hitting the line at pace from fullback carried him from his own half to near the Beckenham 22. Adam Bibby running the perfect supporting line took the pass and coasted home. Freddy Bunting added the extras for a 7-7 score. Sutton and Epsom had weathered the storm and now began to dominate possession. What was to become the theme of the afternoon was errors undoing invention for both sides. A dropped pass, a penalty kicked dead and turnovers conceded all blighted the Rugby Lane men’s progress. Approaching the 40-minute mark Jack Howes won a terrific turnover penalty and Captain Bunting decided on the 3-point option to put his team ahead 10-7. Despite a lengthy period of time added on the scoring for the first period had concluded and the Surrey men turned around 10-7 up.

With the alarming statistics for the 2025-6 season in terms of second half performances by the Black & Whites no one from Rugby Lane was counting numbers in the hen house. For the travelling supporters there was the satisfaction that the tide had turned. For the Balmoral Avenue faithful there had been more than enough evidence that they could take the honours as the fascinatingly poised match resumed. It was a fast start from all concerned as both teams sensed the importance of the first score of the second half. Reversing the policy of the season, much to the delight of ageing alickadoos, Freddy Bunting decided on taking a pot at goal after five minutes. Unfortunately for those with Black & White tinged glasses it narrowly missed.

The game became a stop-and-start affair as errors mounted. Though credit must go to the back row brethren on both sides whose industrious efforts thwarted promising openings, won turnovers and were a ubiquitous source of frustration. It was Beckenham, regaining the pomp of their earlier play, who seized the momentum and were rewarded with the next score. Winger Juai Charles carved through the defence to score and Josh Burke added the conversion to put the hosts 14-10 up. A perfectly struck restart from Freddy Bunting forced a restart drop out from the Beckenham line. Sutton and Epsom took advantage of the territorial position and won a penalty. The 3-point option was shunned for the kick to the corner with a dozen minutes of regular time on the clock. Fortune did not favour the brave but S&E only had themselves to blame as they lost the lineout.

Possibly the turning point of the match came with ten minutes left on the clock as Juai Charles saw yellow and Beckenham were reduced to 14 men. A simple three points were declined as Sutton and Epsom took a tap penalty. Lennie went close as the home forwards stood strong. However, as soon it went wide Gareth O’Brien took advantage of the visitors’ numerical superiority to score out wide. The conversion failed but Sutton & Epsom had their noses in front by 15-14. It

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was a reinvigorated Black & Whites rather than the tiring version of recent times who now took the game by the scruff of the neck. The swerving, stepping and deceptively powerful Adam Bibby broke into the 22 to be felled by an excellent cover tackle. S&E maintained possession and replacement Dan Jones carried towards the line. Once more it was released to the backs and Tom Lennard dummied the cover and scored under the posts. Freddy Bunting chipped over the easy conversion for a 22-14 lead.

Two tries in a few minutes had altered the complexion of the contest. With the game within their grasp Sutton and Epsom tackled tenaciously and kicked sensibly to keep Beckenham at arm's length. The match concluded with two moments that were synonymous of the game. Firstly, Beckenham had an attacking lineout that gave them a great opportunity to get back into the match. It was inexplicably overthrown and lost… it was certainly not the first lost lineout during an afternoon punctuated by costly errors by both teams. Secondly, in the dying moments Sutton and Epsom were in a prime position to go for the bonus point try. The ball was secured and Tom Lennard floated the perfect kick to the corner where not one but two colleagues were waiting unguarded to score. Neither laid a hand on the ball and it hit a knee. The Benny Hill theme tune would have fitted perfectly for the ensuing fiasco as the ball went to halfway. Sanity was resumed and the ball was kicked off the field to secure the 22-14 win for Sutton and Epsom.

Once again this fixture provided excitement and tension until the final whistle. Sutton and Epsom prevailed for a win that was much needed after recent disappointments. Beckenham remained in fourth and have the prospect of promotional play-offs in their own hands. At the other end of the table Old Reigatian's 19-14 loss to Canterbury Pilgrims confirmed their relegation but who joins them is a matter for a very congested lower half of the table. As always the hospitality at Balmoral Avenue was exemplary. Amongst the throng of spectators was Dave Weller who had represented both 1st XVs. The erstwhile flanker, motor cycle racer and expert pumpkin carver diplomatically wore his Beckenham tie to the lunch but secreted his Sutton and Epsom version upon his person in case it would be appropriate. For those Beckenham members of a malicious disposition they may be praying for a heat wave in September because Mr Weller has entered the Welsh Iron Man in Tenby.

Another week off and the season resumes on the 28th February when Sutton and Epsom host Battersea Ironsides whilst Beckenham are at home to Gravesend who are snapping at their heels in fifth place.

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

Beckenham: Bosch, Bennett, Pennacchia, Jebb, Charles, Burke, Gurney, Baker, Aoke-Tiamu, Brown, Prince, Keefe, Moran, Ward & Knowles.
Reps: Richards, Ryan-Coker & L. Caddy.

Epsom scoring a try against Beckenham from a previous fixture. Credit Robin Kennedy.

John Croysdill

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