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Top thrashes bottom

13 February 2023

Sutton & Epsom RFC 5 – Wimbledon RFC 42 – Saturday 11th February. When these two clubs met last season the dominant Dons arrived at Rugby Lane as the unbeaten leaders after eight matches and overwhelming favourites against a Sutton and Epsom XV who were languishing with a couple of wins that included a walkover against the hapless CS Stags. S&E upset the odds and added a further dose of unpalatable medicine to their neighbours when they also beat Wimbledon at SW20 for good measure. That happy memory for Sutton & Epsom fans now seems like Ancient History as the Wimbledon juggernaut arrived on Saturday as league leaders with 17 wins on the bounce, including a November 41-10 victory over the Black & Whites, and pressing for promotion. There was to be no Hans Christian Andersen storyline nor a story penned by Roald Dahl as the visitors departed as 42-5 victors.

Image courtesy Robin Kennedy

	Team	P	W	D	L	Pts
1	Wimbledon	19	18	0	1	90
2	Havant	19	15	0	4	76
3	Camberley	17	15	0	2	
10	Banbury	17	4	2	11	27
11	Royal Wootton Bassett	18	5	0	13	26
12	Sutton & Epsom	18	2	2	14	20

Wimbledon kicked off on an afternoon unaffected by the elements and most suitable for 15-man rugby. Sadly Sutton and Epsom could not resist the Circean charms of the modern fad of aerial ping-pong that resulted in conceding the opening score. The Dons pounced on an ineffective clearance and ran the ball back past the grandstand crowd with outside centre Paul Hendry scything through the defence for his first try of a personally very productive afternoon. Ed Morgan effortlessly added the extras for a 7-0 lead. Sadly S&E's starts have often been more pedestrian than express pace this season and the Cape Town centre added his and Wimbledon's second try moments later. The hosts won a lineout in their 22 and Ross Parsons exploited the blindside but the ravenous visiting pack stole the ball and released their backs and Paul Hendry made the break to saunter home. Ed Morgan did the necessary and the centre was set for the fastest ever league hat trick against the Black & Whites as the hosts trailed 14-0.

The SW20 outfit were determined to turn the screw and continued to dominate proceedings with their excellent winger Ollie Kitto to the fore. Ollie Kitto is not a winger who languishes forlornly on the flank waiting for service but buzzes around the pitch like the most irritating and evasive mosquito. He was denied an assist when his legerdemain was dropped in the but he was soon crossing the whitewash. Wimbledon burst into the 22 and the ball nestled in the winger's hands and he made light of the surrounding traffic to dance his way under the posts. Ed Morgan made it 21-0 at the end of the first quarter.

Things needed to change for the Rugby Lane team and quickly. The team dusted themselves off and reminded themselves that this was a derby game by evoking memories of not only former glories against the Dons but also of their performance against Camberley the previous Saturday as they belatedly entered the contest. Sutton and Epsom began to play with more urgency and worked tirelessly to deny their exalted visitors time and space. Their reward was instantaneous as they were awarded a penalty that they kicked into the corner. From the lineout the forwards ushered Tom Boaden over the line with clinical efficiency. The conversion from the flank drifted wide but the try injected confidence into the body of the Black & Whites. Though the league leaders enjoyed the statistical superiority in terms territory and possession for the remainder of the first period the hosts were far more competitive. The back row triumvirate of London, Hegarty and Caddy were tenacious in the tackle and on the deck and Ollie Baptiste-Wilson started to gain yardage on the extremities. There was a far more determined defence that thwarted the visitors in their quest for the vital fourth try that would secure their bonus point. Steely resolve was evident in abundance as S&E defended for the final five minutes of the first half. A flurry of a 5-metre lineouts and 5-metre penalties were all overcome as Mr Priestley ended the half with Wimbledon 21-5 to the good.

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The table-toppers looked for a reprise of the start of the match and Ollie Baptiste-Wilson was forced into defensive duties as he fly-hacked the ball through the dead ball area to prevent a try. Once more Sutton stayed strong five metres from their line. The sniping effort of Rhys Morgan was denied and a subsequent surge was held up over the line. The siege was relieved as a grateful S&E accepted the drop out from under the posts.

As the Black & White defence pressed hard to deny their opponents time on the ball the error count mounted for their illustrious opponents as passes were knocked on. The cool, calm machine that had swept all before them in the opening exchanges was becoming increasingly frustrated in their search for the fourth try. What had been a ceremonial procession for the soon to be anointed champions was now a serious contest. Throughout this period the Rugby Lane team's attempts at narrowing the deficit were thwarted by the defensive excellence of Wimbledon. Too often the host's possession was disrupted at the breakdown by the scavenging efforts of Messrs Freeman and Pearce.

The Dons tackled with the ferocity of a side who relish their defensive duties and stripped the ball in contact on more than one occasion. In the dying embers of the third quarter the leaders finally secured their fourth try after a frustrating forty fruitless minutes. The vital score followed excellent Sutton defence that included a backpedalling interception and an excellent Austin Bell tackle but the weight of numbers finally told as Paul Hendry completed his hat trick. Ed Morgan bisected the uprights for 28-5.

The game entered the final quarter with the Dons hoping to improve on their impressive points difference in the table and Sutton searching for consoling scores. From the restart replacement Mark Scott powered his way to halfway but the support failed to fully capitalise on his break. The Barham Road Boys, more relaxed after the bonus point, forced another drop out as they encamped in Black & White territory. They were rewarded with a fine score from a scrum. A quick strike was gathered and a couple of passes exchanged saw fullback Ally Duddell surge to the line. The impeccable Ed Morgan converted for 35-5. From the restart the hosts pressed hard to add to the scoreboard.

Ross Parsons took a quick tap penalty and made yards but it was brought back for Sutton and Epsom to have a second chance with a kick in the corner. Despite a fine take by Josh Glanville there was no repeat of the first period success as the Dons halted the drive and earned a scrummage. The final flourish came from Wimbledon as they countered from deep and a flyhack ended up in their grateful hands and replacement Tim Ridler scored try number six. Ed Morgan kept his 100% record with the boot to extend the lead to 42-5. Soon after the referee brought proceedings to a close. Wimbledon were excellent value for their deserved victory with periods of sustained power and pace. Additionally at the breakdown and in their tackling they were disruptive. Who knows why Sutton and Epsom so regularly begin a contest in a lacklustre fashion? Please send answers on a postcard to the Club Secretary. Then they transform into a team trading blows toe-to-toe with the opposition and play with great spirit and no little skill.

This result has propelled Wimbledon closer to the Promised Land of Promotion. For Sutton and Epsom, nails and coffins spring to mind but one must never give up hope and their followers should find solace in the story of Gilbert's poteroo. Next Saturday they travel to Hampshire to take on Havant who currently lie second in the table.

Sutton & Epsom
Ciaran Mohr, Austin Bell, Sam Hurley, Lawrence Elliott, Ollie Baptiste-Wilson, Freddy Bunting, Ross Parsons, Tom Boaden, Alex Mount, Will Lloyd, George Drye ©, Josh Glanville, George London, Rob Hegarty & James Caddy.
Replacements: (all used) Jack Howes, Chris Farrell & Alex Mawdsley.

Wimbledon
Ally Duddell, Ollie Kitto, Paul Hendry, Jack Reville, Max Lufkin, Ed Morgan, Rhys Morgan, Tom Boot, Jake Farnworth, Sam Gratton, Matt Grobler, Jack Cooke ©, Max Freeman, Connor Pearce & Zane Dillinger.
Replacements: (all used) Bradley Ugodulunwa, Mark Scott & Tim Ridler.

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