

ALCESTER RFC MATCH REPORTS

Saturday 27th October 2007

Midlands Division Five West (South)

Manor Park 9 Alcester 12

Alcester recorded a third successive win, and their second league victory of the campaign with a determined but not always pretty performance in Nuneaton. This was a great win for Alcester, who don't have a very good record at the Griff and Coton ground, particularly because they trailed for much of the game and had to dig out a win in the closing stages, just as it looked that the home side might have done enough to earn their first points of the season.

The visitors started up the slope and against a deceptively stiff breeze, which the home side used to good effect in the early stages. It was no surprise to the old heads in the Alcester side, that Manor Park elected to use the wind to keep play in the "dip" in their pitch which sits inside the twenty two at the bowling green end of the ground. Despite expecting their younger and pumped up opponents to play this way, they were largely powerless to do anything about it in the opening stages as they struggled to clear their lines, thanks to a combination of the stern wind against them, and the determined green wall of defence that met them with ball in hand. In addition, Alcester were struggling to come to terms with the interpretation of the ruck situation from the afternoon's match official, and they were six points down through two successful penalty kicks before they offered any real attacking threat of their own.

Although the home side enjoyed the better of the territory and restricted the Alcester men to the occasional counter attack up field, there were no clear cut try scoring chances for either side, and both captains elected to kick at goal any penalty opportunities that came their way. Kicking into the wind, Alcester full back Andy Smith was unable to follow up last week's 100% record, and he dragged both of his opportunities wide of the upright. The home kicker managed to add a third successful kick from the five attempts he had, which left his side 9-0 ahead at the break.

It wasn't until the second half started that Alcester realised what a big advantage playing with the wind was to be, and they enjoyed the same level of territorial domination that their opponents had in the first half. It was not long before they were back in the game, and it was from their bigger and more experienced forwards that the score came. Alcester were awarded a line out less than ten metres from the Manor Park line. The home side elected not to challenge and hooker Dickie Moore found front jumper Andy Flynn, who presented the ball to his fellow lock Dave Marriott to begin the surge towards the line. The visiting pack got the momentum going and drove over the line to score. Two of the front row union, Moore and tight head Steve Lunn both claimed to be in control of the ball as it was grounded under the pile of bodies, a debate that was still carrying on in the curry house in Alcester late on Saturday evening. In the end, Lunn allowed Moore to claim the try and despite Smith missing the kick from wide out on the left, it meant that Alcester were firmly back in the game, and very well on top of the set phase up front.

The home side were now the ones having to rely on the counter attack upfield against the momentum the visitors had, and with the Alcester pack still claiming more than their share of the first phase possession it seemed only a matter of time before the next Alcester score would come. They got close on a number of occasions, and even got over the line once, only to be driven back by some excellent home defence.

Slowly Manor Park began to get back into the game and enjoyed their best spell of the second period, where they were able to put some phases together in Alcester territory. On one occasion the red and blacks were grateful to an excellent tackle by right win Sam Vernon on his opposite man, who initially looked to have rounded him with a free run to the line. Manor Park were further buoyed when Alcester were reduced to fourteen men after their man of the season so far, open side flanker Mica Pieri, was sin binned for a high looking tackle.

Instead of the sin binning acting as a boost for the home side, the visitors raised their game and reclaimed the ascendancy, although it was not until Pieri rejoined the action, that further try scoring chances came their way.

Alcester were awarded a series of penalties inside the home twenty-two. Knowing that they were inside the last ten minutes, and still trailing by four points, they elected to take the scrum on three occasions, but the home side managed to hold out and protect their line. When Alcester were awarded another penalty, full back Smith decided not to leave it to his forwards this time and grabbed the ball and took a quick tap, before feeding skipper Scott Carmichael in the inside centre channel, who broke through a tackle and had a free run to the line for a trade mark score under the posts. Smith converted.

Alcester closed out the remaining minutes of the game to claim the win, which whilst was deserved, was tough on the plucky home side that are still to claim their first points of the campaign. On this showing those points won't be long to arrive.

The visitors joy was soured somewhat when news broke in the changing rooms after the game that they had been mysteriously docked two league points, for an, at the time of writing, unknown offence. There has no been notification of any breaking of the rules and the matter only came to light when one of the players was looking at the league tables on the RFU site on Thursday. Club officials will be taking the matter up with the relevant areas of the RFU this week, to hopefully resolve the matter. As it stands it makes no difference to Alcester's league table position, as even with four league points rather than the two that the RFU table shows, they would still be in seventh place in the table.

Alcester have a break from league action next week, and are scheduled to visit Warley for a friendly.