

ALCESTER RFC MATCH REPORTS

Saturday 12th September

Harborne 31 Alcester 3

Alcester's preparations for their league campaign that starts later this month, were dealt a blow, when their much changed side were well beaten by their Birmingham hosts who were able to field numerous University of Birmingham students in their ranks.

In the first half Alcester enjoyed the better of things territorially and went in front when Max Biltcliffe sent over the first of his two penalty opportunities of the half. Frustratingly for him, the second, easier opportunity some 10 minutes later was dragged wide of the right hand upright.

With the ball in hand, the home side always look dangerous with their bigger and more powerful backs causing problems to the visitors defence. Despite their size advantage the only time they got through the resolute visitors back line, was right on the stroke of half time, when their left wing exploited the overlap to score in the corner. The home fly half brilliantly converted from wide out.

Turning around in the second half playing up the slope and in to the bright late summer sunshine, Alcester struggled for any cohesion in the second period. They were not helped by injuries to three key players that had to leave the field, and were down to fourteen men for the final 15 minutes of the game. Sportingly, the home side lent Alcester a player that was a substitute in the 2nd XV fixture, which prevented the visitors from being further depleted in numbers. Nevertheless, because of the injuries to hooker Simon Green and his replacement, Brett Allard who had spent the earlier part of the game in the centre, the game went to passive scrummaging.

Harborne ran in four tries in the second half to give a resounding looking win for them. The visitors took heart from a gutsy showing, as their much changed team featured only four of the players that won the promotion play off game at the end of last season. The performance of one of the surviving members of that side, fly half Andy Smith, provided a bright spot in the afternoon with a sound tactical kicking performance, particularly when his side was under pressure late in the game. Of the new recruits to the side, young loose head prop Dan Phillips and utility back Shaun Sudworth were the stand out performers, both of them giving real promise of playing prominent parts in the season ahead.

Alcester enjoyed their best spell of the second half right at the end of the game and came very close to crossing the home line, with the rejuvenated Pat Lamb playing at flanker, prominent in a number of the attacking plays throughout the afternoon. As so often during the game however, the visitors' momentum was halted by home infringements at the ruck, with the referee finally losing patience with the home pack too late in the game, and sending the Harborne tight head to the sin bin for the last few minutes of the contest.

Alcester hope to have their injured and unavailable players back and ready for next week's final warm up game, away to last season's play off opponents Warley. Kick off in the Black Country is 3pm.