

**Saturday September 13th 2008**

**Alcester 5 Harborne 5**

Alcester opened their full 1<sup>st</sup> XV account with an entertaining and hard fought draw against their second city opponents, in warm conditions at King's Coughton. The visitors endured the same relegation pain that their hosts had also suffered last season, but they will still be operating one level higher than the red and blacks, having slipped from level 8 to the standing that Alcester occupied last season.

The home side started brightest with plenty of possession up the slope and deep in the visitor's territory without really threatening the home line. Midway through the half the Birmingham outfit started to get the better of things, and they took the lead shortly after with a try from their back line.

With both sets of forwards winning their own ball at scrum and line out, possession was fairly even, but pleasingly the home side were having the better of the breakdown, not least because the visitors conceded a string of penalties for killing the ball at the ruck situation. From one such penalty near the Harborne line, skipper Scott Carmichael took control and spotted his backs lined up better than their opponents, before spinning the ball into midfield where Max Bilcliffe, one of four debutantes in the Alcester side, capped a fine 1<sup>st</sup> XV start with a try. Full back Andy Smith was just wide with the conversion, before he was soon in action at the other end of the field, making a try saving tackle on one of the visitors lock forwards as he galloped towards the line.

Playing down the slope in the second half and with the early autumn sunshine at their backs, the home side had much the better of things in the early stages and should really have gone in front from one of the several chances they carved out. "White line" fever and an over tendency to kick the ball in attacking positions cost them the opportunity to score, and they were nearly made to pay when only a superb Bilcliffe tackle inside the home twenty two, prevented a Harborne score in a rare counter attack up field.

Alcester continued to press for the winning score and were awarded a penalty in the last play of the game, which confident winger Mike Badoud attempted to kick from long range, without success. Shortly before Harborne looked to have won the game when their fly half raced clear and dived in to apparently score in the corner, a try which referee John Jones initially awarded, before the visiting player showed superb sportsmanship in admitting he had dropped the ball in the act of grounding it.

This was a pleasing showing from the red and blacks, delivering a performance which sets them in a positive mood for the start of the league campaign next week, and the tough looking trip to Atherstone.