

Saturday 15th December 2007

Midlands Division Five West (South)

Tenbury Wells 0 Alcester 22

Alcester rounded off on a positive note, what has so far been a disappointing first half of the league season, with victory in this “must win” fixture against pointless basement boys Tenbury. The result lifts them up a place above fellow strugglers Harbury, and they could still yet climb one place further without playing, if the result of their appeal against the two points deducted earlier in the season goes their way. Alcester are still awaiting the date of their appeal hearing.

Alcester made the 36 mile journey (it just seems like longer) in a positive mood and this was reflected in their early play. However they tried to force proceedings too much in the early stages, which led to passes being snatched in sight of the line and over eagerness at the ruck situation, where they conceded a string of early penalties allowing the home side to clear the danger. Tenbury also had opportunities to take the lead when two of the penalties were in Alcester territory, but the home kicker dragged his attempts wide.

With the Alcester pack dominating possession, particularly at the scrum where the home eight were being marched back at pace and were struggling to win any of their own ball cleanly, the visitors were well in control. Fit again lock Dave Marriott, who celebrated his 40th birthday in midweek, was the pick of the red and blacks forwards, where his presence brought extra power and balance to the tight play as well as in the loose where he caused problems for the home defence with his determined charges towards the line.

It was from a series of forward drives near the home line, that the score finally came, and it was no surprise that it came from a familiar source. Skipper Scott Carmichael, restored today to his favoured scrum half berth, dived over from short range after his pack had scattered the home defence. Full back Tom Burgess hit the upright with his conversion attempt.

The score settled the visitors and they began to play with much more cohesion, spending much of the rest of the half camped deep in Tenbury territory. Alcester still favoured route one through their forwards to create space for their backs to exploit and wing Stuart Whitehead was next to profit from such domination. The home side looked to have cleared the danger after determinedly defending their line against several drives from the visitors, but the ball arrived at Whitehead tight against the right hand touchline. With little space to operate, the diminutive winger danced and darted past three tackles, to create space for himself to race in to the corner, for what was a brilliant finish. Burgess once again hit the woodwork with his conversion, attempt this time smacking the cross bar with his excellent attempt from out wide.

Alcester continued their domination and were guilty only of not racking up a much bigger half time lead. Centre James Woodhams, fly half Matt Gwynn and flanker Phil Birks all went very close to scoring, before Carmichael added his second after Gwynn had kicked and chased down field, before snaring the home full back and forcing the

mistake allowing the Alcester skipper to pick up and drop over the line for a simple score.

The second half continued the visitors' domination, but they did not have all of their own way with Tenbury offering much more in attack than they had in the opening period. The Alcester forwards were still monopolising possession, at both the scrum and line out, where Phil Birks dominated proceedings spoiling a number of Tenbury throws.

Alcester still looked the most likely to add to their score and they came desperately close on two occasions when first Dave Marriott charged down a home kick and just failed to touch down as the ball bounced over the try line, before hooker Steve Wade, enjoying his best game so far in his new position, was held up over the line after a powerful drive.

The visitors changed Birks, Marriott and wing Andy Smith for Andy Speirs, Nev Teasdale and Dom Skinner, but the personnel changes did little to disrupt the Alcester flow and shortly afterwards Carmichael completed his hat trick of scores, with a trade mark bull dozing run from a short range tap penalty. Fly half Gwynn took over the kicking duties to add the extras.

With the game won, Alcester were forced to defend their line, as the plucky Tenbury side went in search of a score. The visitors were in no mood to give up their clean sheet cheaply and some good defence, led by some typically ferocious tackling from Director of rugby Nick O'Connor, resulted in no further scores in the game.

Whilst everyone else in the league has also beaten Tenbury this season, on this showing their first win won't be far away, particularly given the distance that some of the teams have to travel to play them. As for Alcester they go into the Christmas break on a positive note and hope for better things in the second half of the season.

Boxing Day

Alcester once again hold their annual Presidents XV vs Chairmans XV match at the King's Coughton ground and all members and friends are welcome to watch the match and have a festive drink or two with the players afterwards. Kick off is 11.30am and the annual raffle will be drawn in the bar following the game.