

ALCESTER RFC MATCH REPORTS

Saturday 16th February

Midlands Division Five West (South)

Alcester 17 Keresley 7

The loyal and regular followers of Alcester's 1st XV could be forgiven for thinking that they were watching a completely different side to the one that capitulated so poorly to fellow strugglers Harbury the previous week. Whilst the red and blacks certainly benefitted from half a dozen changes to the squad, thanks to 1st XV regulars returning from injury and unavailability, the rest that remained in the side from the previous week approached this match with a completely different attitude and an increased will to win against the league's third placed side.

Having lost narrowly to the former pit men earlier in the season, Alcester knew that with a performance near to that they are capable of, would see them competitive throughout. Playing up the slope and in to the bright sunshine in the first half, it was the visitors who enjoyed the better of the opening exchanges, keeping play in the Alcester half. Ten minutes in, one of their attacks was thwarted by fit again flanker Mika Pieri, who intercepted a stray pass and sprinted deep inside Keresley territory. When he was tackled the home side still outnumbered the defence, but they made a hash of the opportunity and the early chance was gone.

The remainder of the half belonged to Alcester, with their forwards gaining the upper hand against a Keresley pack that had shunted them around the park in the reverse fixture between these two sides earlier in the season.

Wing Andy Smith was just wide with a penalty opportunity, before in the dying moments of the half, the pack launched another drive following caught line out ball. In the open play that followed, another returning player, giant lock Dave Marriott was prominent in the attack, before a more familiar attacking source in scrum half Robbie Parker took up the charge only to be halted literally inches short of the line. The forwards secured ball from the ensuing ruck, and veteran loose head Nev Teasdale picked up and burrowed over the line to give his side the lead. This rounded off an all round superb performance by "Sniffer" the Alcester stalwart, who complimented his usually solid tight play, with some great work in the loose.

The home side continued the domination after the break, with skipper Scott Carmichael making better use of the slope and bright sunshine at his back than his opposite number had done, to keep play inside Keresley territory, with a series of probing kicks to the corners. Following one such kick, no 8 Phil Birks stole the visitors throw at the front of the line out allowing his pack to form a solid driving maul which culminated in them crashing over the line for what looked like their second score. Unfortunately, the man in possession, hooker Dickie Moore, was under too big a pile of bodies to allow the referee to see the grounding clearly and the home side were left disappointed.

They did not have to wait long for their second score, however as their continued domination paid off. Fly half Carmichael blazed his way through a gap in the visitors defence to double his side's account.

Now in complete command of the game, they scored a third try through James Woodhams, today operating at outside centre, who clinically finished a smart back line move. Woodhams bravely played this game, despite still suffering some of the effects of last week's dislocated jaw sustained in the Harbury game.

The visitors showed why they are riding high in the table, as they upped their game in the final quarter, and after a period of sustained pressure inside Alcester territory, they were rewarded with a score through their stocky centre, who broke a couple of tackles to touch down under the posts for a try that was converted.

Alcester closed out the remainder of the game to claim, in the opinion of most observers, their best win of the season and in the process leapt back above last weeks conquerors, Harbury, in the league table.

Whilst the whole side performed superbly, it was the collective showing of the Alcester back row of Birks, Pieri and 18 year old debutante Luke Skidmore that stood out.

The King's Coughton side have a break from league action next week, when they play host to their nearest neighbours Redditch. Kick off at King's Coughton is 2.15pm.