

Saturday 17th January 2009

Alcester 12 Birmingham Medics 22

Alcester hosted the annual visit of the University of Birmingham medical students, and at 1st XV level, ran them closer than they have done for a number of seasons, before eventually surrendering their unbeaten home record they had previously held this season.

Against the slope and wind in the first half, they had to defend resolutely to keep their student opponents out, but were powerless to stop the first score fifteen minutes in, when the visitor's backs created the overlap out wide to cross the line for the first score.

The Medics hit straight back from the restart and once again forced Alcester on to the back foot. The red and blacks defended well but were struggling to retain any sustained period of possession, owing to the penalty account against them. They further infringed as the visitors were in the act of scoring, as lock Andy Flynn was yellow carded for a high tackle on the Medics no 8. Although the infringement prevented the score, the visitors scored straight from the resultant tap penalty.

Being down to fourteen players galvanized the home side and they enjoyed their best period of the half. Back rower Phil Birks came close to reducing the deficit for his side, but was held up over the line and there was no further score, which meant the home side trailed to the two unconverted scores at the break.

With the elements in the second half, Alcester enjoyed much more of the proceedings and with their heavier and more experienced scrum now well on top they secured a regular flow of ball for their backs to use. From one such scrum, Alcester broke blind and when the ruck was formed following a tackle by the visitors, Alcester moved the ball right to Scott Carmichael who found a gap in the defence to set centre Ash Newdick in to score. Newdick converted his own try.

Alcester continued to dominate possession without creating any clear further openings, and slowly the Medics regained the ascendancy, scoring a further 12 points through two tries and a conversion, to put the game beyond doubt.

Alcester refused to let their heads drop and upped the ante near the end, which was a pleasing change to previous years when the Medics superior fitness has seen them run clear in the final quarter. The home side forced a series of scrums near the visitors line, and although the visitors held out when a pushover try looked likely, scrum half Robbie Parker picked up from the base of one scrum and darted to the line, just managing to stretch far enough to squeeze the ball over.

Near the end of the game skipper for the day Ollie Braley had the indignity of being Alcester's second player in the bin for the afternoon, after the referee singled him out once he had finally lost patience for the number of warnings he had dished out to the home side for being offside.

There were plenty of positives in defeat for Alcester and the most important thing of all was for them to finally get a game under their belt this year, after two frozen weekends. They return to the serious business of league action next week, when Coventry Saracens are the visitors to Kings Coughton for a 2.15pm kick off. Saracens lost to unbeaten Rugby Welsh in the only game in Alcester's division this weekend, which meant that Alcester drop back to second place now that the Rugby side has played their game in hand.