

ALCESTER RFC MATCH REPORTS

Saturday 1st March

Coventry Welsh 0 Alcester 17

Alcester kept their hopes of avoiding the drop alive, with their best away win of the season and their first at their opponents Burbages Lane ground in over a decade. The win avenges a narrow home defeat suffered at the hands of the Coventry outfit earlier in the season.

Starting against the wind and in to the sun Alcester used the conditions sensibly and were able to keep play inside the home half for much of the opening exchanges. Although the first quarter of the game was fairly even, it was the visitors enjoying the better of things, just edging the possession stats but thanks to the distribution of skipper Scott Carmichael at fly half, utilising their ball far better than their opponents.

Scoring chances were few and far between given the even nature of the game, but the deadlock was broken around the half hour mark. The visitor's quickest player, wing Stuart Whitehead, went on a typically mazy and pacy run deep inside home territory avoiding several attempted tackles, before feeding his skipper Carmichael in support, and Alcester's leading scorer exploited the gap and dived over.

Despite having the benefit of the conditions, Alcester expected an early onslaught from their hosts. They were handed a boost early on in the half, however, when from a line out inside the home twenty two, the ball was spun back to the replacement Coventry lock forward, who made a total hash of an attempted clearance kick and the ball was pounced on by his opposite number Dave Marriott who secured possession and set the ruck. As the referee was unsighted with the ball under bodies at the ruck, he awarded the scrum to the visitors as the team in control. With the Alcester pack now well on top at the scrum, they got the nudge on allowing scrum half Robbie Parker to feed his talismanic skipper, who spotted a gap in the defence to double both his and his side's try count.

Welsh enjoyed plenty of possession in the second half, but they were met with disciplined defence where Alcester refused to commit too many players to rucks to allow them to set out flat across the park. Where the home side were able to get short pop balls for their forwards to run onto at pace, they were stopped by some thunderous tackles in the visiting defence by a number of Alcester players, led by man of the match Carmichael and tight head prop Nathan Webber.

Another mistake by the home side gave Alcester more attacking territory. Turning to chase a kick into space from the Alcester backs, a Welsh defender elected to kick the ball over his dead ball line from just inside his twenty two metre line, when he had time to turn and clear. The visiting pack blitzed the scrum and shunted their opponents back over their line, but the scrum was reset and from the second attempt no 8 Phil Birks picked up and dived over to make the game safe. Full back Tom Burgess added the extras.

Welsh continued to press when they had the ball, but Alcester were determined to maintain a rare clean sheet and player coach Steve Lea on as a replacement, picked up the thunderous defence baton with two massive hits on opponents to keep the defensive line intact.

Alcester went on to close the game out safely, with their excellent team performance matched only by that of the afternoon's referee, an exchange referee from Canada, who communicated superbly throughout and marshalled the game with authority.

With three league games to go they now trail fourth from bottom Manor Park by one league point, although this is as good as two when the Nuneaton side's vastly superior points difference is taken in to account. Having had their appeal against the two points deducted turned down, and also having received confirmation that three sides are likely to be relegated this season, it is probable that Alcester will need to win all three games remaining to stay up. This aim starts with the visit of Dudley Wasps on Saturday to Kings Coughton for a 3pm kick off, where the red and blacks will be hoping to avenge the defeat they suffered on the opening day of the season.