

ALCESTER RFC MATCH REPORTS

Saturday 20th February 2010

Midlands Division Four West (South)

Alcester 8 Manor Park 7

Alcester secured a crucial league win, their first victory of 2010, in front of Chairman Steve Lunn and his assembled guests for their annual pre match lunch.

The hardy nature of the King's Coughton ground came to the fore, as this match was the only one that was able to be played in this division and although there was still some slight snow coverage in patches towards the top of the slope, for the most part the playing surface was a good one, albeit a little sticky in parts.

Having lost a tight match to the same opponents in Nuneaton during the reverse fixture earlier in the season, Alcester elected to pick a side to match the mobility of the mainly youthful Manor Park pack, and with five of the starting eight under the age of 25, including three of 20 and under, the forwards average age came close to that of their young back line for the first time this season.

Starting down the slope in the first half, the home side started well and dominated the first period, although their ability to finish opportunities whilst dominant, which has caused problems in a number of games this season, looked like it would come back to haunt them again. All the home side had for their domination was a Max Biltcliffe penalty, when the Alcester kicker converted the second opportunity presented to him, after the first was dragged wide in the poor kicking conditions under foot.

The home side continued their good start despite having the disruption of losing hooker Brett Allard to a rib injury, the unlucky Alcester stalwart facing another period on the side lines after only having recently returned following two months out with ankle ligament damage. Player coach Steve Lea replaced Allard with tight head Lorne Currie moving to hooker to facilitate the arrival of the veteran prop to the action.

With their pack still on top, where the performance of loose head Matt Bolton playing his first rugby since mid December stood out, Alcester continued to enjoy the territorial advantage and they were given a further boost when the visiting fly half was yellow carded after having been adjudged to have tackled an Alcester player off the ball. As so often is the case, the reduction to fourteen men seemed to galvanise the offending team and the only scoring opportunity for the remainder of the half, came the visitors way when they won their first penalty within range of the posts. With their main kicker in the bin, his deputy had a similar problem to Alcester's Biltcliffe earlier in the game, with his standing foot slipping just at the point as the kicking foot made contact with the ball, meaning the opportunity was missed.

The visitors had the benefit of the conditions at their back as they turned around 3-0 behind at half time, and when they were restored to their full compliment of players, once the sin bin period was over, they began to get a period of domination in the game for the first time. Now it was Alcester's turn to defend, which initially they did well

both out wide and up front where teenage lock forward Stuart Fletcher continued his excellent work of the first half with a number of important tackles. Substitute flanker Andy Trigg, on at half time for another of the home side's teenagers, Adam Beech, also did some great work in defence as Alcester were forced to spend a sustained period deep in their own territory.

The visitors also reshuffled their pack and one of their replacements came with the introduction of a big outside centre, who immediately started to cause the home side problems, creating a number of opportunities with direct charges at the heart of the home back line for his team mates to play off. It was through their previously under pressure pack, however, that the Nuneaton side's score came, as they caught clean ball at the line out to set up an unstoppable driving maul from five yards out and crash over the line. Their fly half converted well to give his side a 7-3 advantage, approaching the final quarter of the game.

Alcester made their final substitution of the game when no 8 Phil Birks was introduced to give his side some more direction and aggression up front and this did give the Kings Coughton men a lift, in a game that looked to be getting away from them. It was still against the run of play when Alcester regained the lead. The pack pinched a scrum against the head, allowing the ball to be moved swiftly through the hands right where Jim Watson, who had moved from the flank to the wing at half time when Trigg joined the action, rounded off the move to score.

The final ten minutes of the game were extremely nervy for all concerned at Kings Coughton as Alcester held out. They also held the numerical advantage again for the final few minutes of the game, when one of the Manor Park wings became the second visitor to be sent to the sin bin.

Referee Dermot Collins final whistle was met with a loud cheer and great relief for all concerned at Alcester. This all important win lifts Alcester three league places into mid table as they take a break from league action next week, when they are due to host old adversaries Birmingham Civil Service at Kings Coughton on one of the feature dates in the calendar for their Golden Jubilee season. All Alcester's club captains in their 50 year history will be attending a lunch before the on field action, which is followed by England vs. Ireland on the big screen in the clubhouse at 5pm. All are welcome to come and watch the international with friends old and new.