

## **ALCESTER RFC MATCH REPORTS**

**Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2010**

**Midlands Division Four West (South)**

**Birmingham Exiles 16 Alcester 24**

After recording their first league win of the season on the road the previous week, Alcester followed that up with another good away win in Bickenhill against the league's basement boys Birmingham Exiles, completing the league double over their opponents in the process.

The home side went in front right from the kick off, when Alcester impeded at a maul having gathered the starting kick, and the home fly half slotted over the first penalty of the game.

In damp and greasy conditions ball handling was never going to be easy and this led to a scrappy opening quarter of the game and numerous knock ons and turnovers. At the scrum, the visiting pack had the upper hand, but the hosts were on top at the second phase and contact area, resulting in most of the play being in Alcester territory. The red and blacks gave a second penalty away, but the Exiles kicker missed from in front of the posts, however he made no mistake moments later with his third attempt of the afternoon to give his side a 6-0 lead.

With the Alcester pack also having the better of the line out, where lock Pat Lamb excelled throughout the afternoon, the visitors started to get some better field positions of their own and their first scoring opportunity of the game came shortly after the half hour mark. Left wing Max Biltcliffe's long range penalty attempt, fell just short, but better was to follow from the visitors moments later.

Ever alert open side Ed Hartley pounced on the latest mistake in the greasy conditions, this time by the Exiles back line. The ball was set well by the visiting pack and when fly half Andy Smith was found, he fed back inside to loose head Matt Bolton on the charge, who broke a tackle and charged over the line for his side's first try. Biltcliffe added the extras to put his side in front.

The home side fired back in the closing stages of the half, but some excellent defence by Alcester, added to the difficult ball handling conditions, kept the home side out, so that the visitors continued to lead at the break.

The second half started in a similar vein to the first, with Exiles just edging the possession stats and they regained the lead with another penalty after Alcester had strayed offside at a ruck.

The visitors made two changes in quick succession in the early stages of the half, with Andy Flynn on to replace Phil Birks who had given his usual all action performance, this time in an unfamiliar role in the second row and James Woodhams making a welcome return to 1<sup>st</sup> XV action after recently returning to the area following several

months living in Wales. Woodhams replaced Biltcliffe on the wing, with the latter having given a good defensive performance to help keep his side's line intact.

As the game approached the final quarter, Alcester upped the physicality of the contact exchanges, which led to a few niggles, but also more handling mistakes as the ball represented the proverbial bar of soap, particularly for the now under pressure home side, from which the visitors were soon to profit from on the scoreboard.

Exiles spilled a ball inside their own half, and the visitors hacked ahead, with skipper Scott Carmichael winning the race to the loose ball to gather and dive over the line. Fly half Andy Smith took over the kicking duties to add the extras.

Buoyed by this success, within minutes Alcester had increased their lead in similar circumstances, with this time right wing Jimmy Watson seizing on another dropped ball to hack ahead and win the race to score wide out right, making for a difficult conversion which Smith just failed with.

With five minutes to go and after another period of pressure near the home line, centre Sam Kirby charged down an attempted Exiles clearance, which dropped over the try line right in front of the grateful Mika Pieri, allowing the back rower the most simple of touch downs. Smith again narrowly missed the conversion from wide out.

To their credit, the home side never gave up and roared back with a try of their own in the closing stages, from one of their lock forwards, to bring a score line which more accurately reflected the balance of play in the afternoon.

The result leaves the home side deep in relegation trouble, but cements Alcester's fifth placed position and one more win should guarantee their safety. Exiles are an awful lot better than their league position suggests, with a number of their defeats being narrow ones this season, and if the inevitable happens and they do go down, they should bounce back at the first attempt if they are able to keep the side together.

For Alcester, coach Steve Lea praised a battling showing from his young side and rightly singled out the performance of tight head Chris Lowe as the man of the match effort, with the giant prop showing more and more promise each time he plays in this position.

Only a week after their first meeting of the season, Alcester host Rugby Welsh in the rearranged return league fixture next Saturday, with kick off at Kings Coughton scheduled for 3pm.

### **The Harold Stilwell Trophy and Alcester Sevens**

Alcester are preparing themselves for a busy end of season schedule next month. On the weekend of 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> April, they host senior tournaments on both days at their Kings Coughton ground.

On Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> the 15 a side competition for Warwickshire clubs, The Harold Stilwell Trophy will be held at Alcester. Games in this competition are of 10 minutes each way.

On the following day Alcester host their traditional sevens tournament, which is always well attended by clubs from the local area and some further afield. Entries will be welcome from all clubs and details can be obtained by visiting the ARFC website [www.alcesterrfc.co.uk](http://www.alcesterrfc.co.uk)