

Saturday September 20th 2008

Midlands Division Six West (South East)

Atherstone 3 Alcester 16

Alcester made the journey to the north of the county to begin their league campaign in a positive fashion, with a hard fought, but well deserved win at Atherstone.

The home side started well with their pack causing trouble for the visiting eight, although the red and blacks looked to have the upper hand out wide, and when their forwards settled they provided scrum half Robbie Parker with enough ball to set his back line free.

An early injury in the front row saw no 8 Matt Bolton restored to his more familiar loose head role, and this steadied the Alcester scrum, which meant they were now secure on their own ball, after being shunted off a couple of early put ins.

From a home attack that was thwarted, the visitors broke quickly down field and the backs linked up superbly to send Rup Daffern over for the game's opening score.

The home side fought back and their kicker was successful with his second penalty attempt at goal, before Alcester full back Andy Smith, who works in Atherstone, showed little respect for his work colleagues some of whom were playing against him, whilst others "offered advice" from the touch line, to convert two penalty chances of his own, leaving his side 11-3 ahead at the break. The second penalty came from the same incident that saw the sin binning of the home fly half for a high tackle.

If the first half was even, the second belonged to Alcester and they started well, when talismanic skipper Scott Carmichael, blazed his way past three would be tacklers from inside the home twenty two, to dive over, and extend his side's lead. Smith was wide with the conversion, and a further penalty opportunity, but this didn't detract from a fine display by the Alcester full back, who marshalled the back three of the visitors' line well.

Atherstone enjoyed a period of sustained pressure near the Alcester line, but they were met with some stern defence led by pack leader Phil Birks and skipper Carmichael, to keep the home side out. The closest the all blacks came to scoring was in the final few minutes of the game, when replacement wing Stuart Whitehead had to be at his fleet of foot best to keep out one of the home backs. In fact it was Alcester who enjoyed much the better of things in the final quarter and had further chances to add to the score with Robbie Parker and veteran player coach Steve Lea, on for a 20 minute cameo at prop, just failing to add to the visitors try count.

The hosts were not helped by another sin binning near the end of the game, this time for their open side flanker for another high tackle, although by now the game was lost for them, and Alcester were able to celebrate an excellent start to their campaign.

Alcester are in EDF Energy Junior Vase action on Saturday, playing host to last season's league adversaries. Kick off at King's Coughton is 3pm with all spectators welcome.