

Saturday March 21st 2009

Midlands Division Six West (South East)

Wellesbourne 12 Alcester 30

Alcester reclaimed second position in the league table with a good away win against ever improving opponents. A match that was twice postponed due to frozen pitches earlier in the year ended up being played in the beautiful early spring weather, at the third attempt, on a firm pitch making for ideal running rugby conditions.

The visitors made the ideal start, going ahead inside the first few minutes, thanks to a try for full back Tom Burgess, making his first senior start of the season. The Alcester youngster rounded off a flowing back line move to score in the corner. The home side hit straight back and caught their opponents napping following their opening try, and only a great tackle by Burgess kept Wellesbourne from levelling the scores. This tackle resulted in a scrum allowing the red and blacks to take play back up field where no 8 Mika Pieri thought he had doubled his side's lead, but despite the referee awarding the "try" the Alcester back rower had actually touched down on the five metre line rather than the try line, with the football pitch markings catching the players and officials out not for the only time in the afternoon.

The visitors didn't have to wait long for their second score, however where Burgess crossed for his second score following a flowing back line move from the back of the scrum which formed following Pieri's disallowed "try."

The game was being played at a fairly frenetic pace in the opening quarter and local derby passions came to the fore for the first of a number of occasions during the afternoon, which resulted in Alcester right wing Rob Smith and the Wellesbourne outside centre being yellow carded following a brief bout of "fisty cuffs." Whilst both sides were down to fourteen men, the home side opened their account. Alcester got hands to a Wellesbourne line out near the visitors' line, but the ball back was scrappy and the home side reacted quickest to gather and touch down over the line. The home kicker reduced the deficit to three points, with a successful conversion.

Alcester regained the ascendancy and from another catch at their dominant line out, their pack drove on from where tight head Steve Lunn broke towards the line. He fed his support and the ball moved through two other pairs of hands before open side Jim Watson exploited the gap in the home defence to score under the posts. Centre Max Biltcliffe converted.

Alcester dominated the closing stages of the half and came close to their fourth try when lock Dave Marriott was held up by the three opponents he carried over the line with him, following a trade mark bullocking run by the visitors' giant second row forward.

With a 17-7 lead, Alcester began the second half as they ended the first, and their domination was underlined by the score of the game in the opening stages of the half. Fijian Pieri continued the form he has showed during his excellent season to date, by picking up at the back of his advancing scrum, arcing wide of the home back row and blazing through the

attempted tackle of the Wellesbourne fly half. By now the Alcester no 8 was fully into his stride and he jinked and weaved his way through the remaining defence for a brilliant individual score from just inside his home half.

Replacement Alcester wing Jack Sears added to their score with a well taken try from his first touch of the ball, despite still having plenty to do to round off the chance when he gathered possession.

The plucky nature of the hosts was epitomized when they refused to let their heads drop despite being well beaten, and they were rewarded with a second try. The final score of the game came from the boot of Alcester fly half Andy Smith who took over kicking duties following the loss of regular kicker Biltcliffe after a heavy tackle on the young inside centre. Smith converted a penalty after the Wellesbourne back line had strayed offside.

Whilst the Kings Coughton men could still catch top of the table Rugby Welsh, realistically the league leaders are not going to slip up in the remaining two league games and the most they can really hope for is a second place and a promotion play off against the runners up in Midlands Six West (South West.) To maintain their promotion push, Alcester must win their remaining three league games starting with the visit to Old Wheatleyans next Saturday.