

Saturday November 22nd 2008

EDF Junior Vase Round Four

Redditch 18 Alcester 13

In their first ever competitive meeting against Redditch, Alcester bowed out of the national vase against their nearest neighbours, but only after a great performance in conditions that resembled a swamp, after the heavy rain of the previous 48 hours.

Alcester were forced to make several changes to their side, mainly in their pack after injuries and work commitments resulted in only three of last week's starting eight being available. The selection dilemmas prompted the first senior starts of the season for club chairman, Steve Lunn at tight head and Director of Rugby, Nick O'Connor at No 8, and the veteran warhorses both had great games, which they will hope they can take the rest of the season to recover from, when the regular contingent return to the side next week.

Playing up the slope in the first half, the visitors started brightest. They took the lead inside the opening five minutes when fly half Ash Newdick converted his first penalty opportunity of the afternoon, after one of the Kingfishers' back row had failed to stay on his feet at a ruck.

Within a further five minutes, Alcester increased their lead. Hooker Brett Allard accurately found Phil Birks at the back of the line out, and the off the top ball to scrum half Robbie Parker, set his backs free. The ball was moved quickly into midfield where skipper Scott Carmichael broke the home defensive line, and found Allard who had quickly joined the attack in support. He fed open side flanker Jim Watson who sprinted in for a very well worked try. Newdick added the extras.

Slowly the home side gained the ascendancy, aided by the conditions, which made defending a scrum up the slope almost impossible as none of the visiting eight could get any sort of purchase from the ground. Redditch closed the gap, when the under pressure visiting back line had a kick charged down near the try line, which made for the simplest of finishes for the home side's opening try. In very poor kicking conditions the conversion was missed.

Now firmly on top, the Kingfishers forced a penalty after Alcester failed to release ball at a ruck, and this time their kicker made no mistake to bring his side within two points.

In this see saw opening to the game, Newdick again slotted over another well struck penalty for the visitors, when the same home back row forward infringed at another ruck.

Back game Redditch and with their best move of the half from the back of an advancing scrum, they moved the ball to their left wing who raced in unchallenged having forced the overlap. From out wide the difficult conversion was missed to leave the scores level.

The rest of the half saw Alcester defend their line extremely well, and they had their moments in attack too. Steve Lunn came closest to adding to Alcester's score, but just failed

to keep hold of the ball which at times resembled a bar of soap, when he thundered in to the defence from a short range penalty.

Playing with the conditions in the second half, the Alcester scrum enjoyed the same level of domination as their opponents had in the first period, however they were not able to make the most of the increased amount of possession, and a lot of the game was played in the middle of the park, as the game seemingly moved from ruck to ruck with numerous turnovers, as both sides scrapped for the ball in the mud.

The home side emerged with the clearest try scoring chances. They took one mid way through the half for their third try delivering an 18-13 lead, and came closest to adding to their score, when only some excellent and sometimes desperate defence on at least two occasions by Alcester, kept them out.

In the end, although Redditch progressed to the next stage of the Vase, the visitors were very happy with their performance against a side they haven't beaten in over a decade, and one whom are riding high in the division above them, with only one competitive defeat to their name this year.

The red and blacks return to league action next weekend, with another trip to the University area of Coventry to face Coventry Tech, to replay the earlier league fixture that has been "wiped" from the records, after the home side exercised their right to the seemingly bizarre ruling which allows games to be replayed when scrums have to go to passive in a game when front row forwards are injured. Alcester "won" the last game 34-0, and were 22 points up when the replacement prop had to leave the field. Despite this, they will be taking nothing for granted in the replayed fixture, especially because their opponents have returned improved results in recent weeks. Kick off in South Coventry is 2.15pm.

Alcester 2nd XV

Alcester's second string was left with a blank weekend after scheduled opponents, Veseyans, cried off late in the week.