

Saturday April 25th 2009

Midlands Six West Promotion Play Off

Alcester 25 Warley 7

After the disappointment of relegation last year, Alcester returned to the Midlands Five West level at the first attempt after defeating their Black Country visitors with an assured performance, in the promotion play off at Kings Coughton.

In beautiful spring conditions and in front of the largest crowd at Kings Coughton in many years, an excellent game of rugby ensued with both sides showing commitment one would come to expect for such an important match..

The home side started well and took the lead with a well struck Max Biltcliffe penalty. They continued to press and maintained the upper hand, but the sizeable Warley travelling contingent had something to cheer when their side scored the first try against the run of play. Alcester fly half Andy Smith attempted a chip over the Warley rush defence, but his kick was charged down by his opposite number, who reacted quickest to gather the loose ball and race clear to the line.

Undeterred Alcester continued to press, and although the forward exchanges were relatively even, the home side looked most dangerous with ball in hand which they proved when left wing Stuart Whitehead raced in to round off a good move by his backs. Biltcliffe again converted. Ten minutes later, Whitehead was on hand again to double both his own and his side's try count, although this time there was a touch of fortune about the score as an attempted clearance by a Warley defender was completely miscued and hit the Alcester speedster's knee, before bouncing over the line allowing the grateful Whitehead to touchdown.

The remainder of the half was a tight and nervy affair of few chances with both defences on top, and the majority of play taking place in the middle of the park.

With a 15-7 half time lead, Alcester replaced stalwart prop Nev Teasdale with Nathan Webber, playing his first rugby since December after an injury. With Teasdale having worn his man down in an even first half battle, the fresh legs of Webber reaped the benefit and with their giant tight head in imperious form in the set phase and in open play, the home pack were rejuvenated and quickly gained the upper hand in the early exchanges of the second half.

Another man in great form today, Max Biltcliffe, increased his side's lead with a second accurate penalty, before the visitors were temporarily reduced to fourteen men after one of their flankers was yellow carded for failing to retreat the ten yards and pulling back Alcester scrum half, Robbie Parker who had taken a quick tap penalty. The home side were unable to capitalize on their numerical advantage, and the visitors actually enjoyed their best spell of the half whilst their man was absent.

The respite for the visitors from the home domination, was brief however, and there was a collective sigh of relief from most at Kings Coughton when the score to close the game

arrived. Talismanic skipper Scott Carmichael crossed for his side's third try after the backs had launched an incisive move from the back of their forward's dominant scrum. Biltcliffe again converted.

Alcester could have scored further points to make their domination even clearer, with the impressive full back Ollie Braley and replacement flanker Jim Watson both coming close, but in the end were more than happy to settle for an excellent 25-7 win that rounds off a really good season for Steve Lea's charges. As well as ending with promotion, Alcester were able to preserve their proud unbeaten home record in competitive matches throughout the season.

This was a day that will live long in the memory for the Kings Coughton side as they approach their 50th jubilee season. Many of the important names and faces from Alcester's first fifty years were present for this match in an all round excellent support for both sides which made for an atmosphere that would have done justice to a game several levels higher than this.

Alcester Presentation Evening

With the 1st XV having achieved promotion only hours before, the presentation evening was an extra special celebration at the Kings Coughton club house. Whilst several fun awards were handed out for such accolades as most time in the sin bin and most fines throughout the season, the serious awards were won by the following:

1st XV Players Player of the Year: Phil Birks
Coaches Player of the Year: Aaron Mason
Most Improved Player: Ollie Braley
Young Player of the Year: Jim Watson
2nd XV Player of the Year: Jamie Bowen and Jason Read (joint winners)
Colts Players Player of the Year: Rich Hartley
Colts Coaches Player of the Year: Andy Heap

Thursday 30th April

The final action of the season at Kings Coughton takes place on Thursday evening from 7pm, when Alcester host a City Link XV for the second playing of what is hoped will be an annual charity match. The City Link side, narrowly won a tight contest last year, after coming back from 19-0 down at half time to win the game by two points. Former England and British Lion no 8 Dean Richards, the Harlequins Head Coach, was instrumental in last year's win after coming on at half time, and it is expected that he will make another appearance as well as some other former professionals. Entrance to the match is free and all friends old and new will be made most welcome. The bar will be open as usual and a barbeque is planned for the evening.