

ALCESTER RFC MATCH REPORTS

Saturday 26th January 2008

Midlands Division Five West (South)

Alcester 13 Manor Park 10

Alcester made a welcome and much needed return to winning ways, to complete the double over their opponents from Nuneaton, their second hard fought and narrow win against them of the season.

A side showing six personnel and three positional alterations from the one that was thumped at Rugby St Andrews last week, started down the slope with the slight wind at their backs, and not surprisingly given the changes took their time to settle. In fact both sides struggled with the referee's interpretation of playing the ball at the tackle situation, which led to a kickable penalty opportunity each in the opening quarter. Alcester's Tom Burgess narrowly missed from wide out left with his attempt, before the visiting kicker also strayed left of the uprights with his kick.

The home side were enjoying the better of things in the first half, with their line out in particular much improved on recent showings, thanks mainly to the presence of Phil Birks who returned following his illness that kept him out of last week's game.

After half an hour Alcester got the opening score that their domination deserved, thanks to the accurate boot of centre Andy Smith.

Alcester continued to press and after a further period of pressure, where the home front row were prominent in a series of forward drives down the left hand side of the field, they forced the opening try of the game. From the base of a ruck at their left wing attacking position inside the Manor Park twenty two, the ball was spun quickly to the right, where open side James Woodhams joined the back line to make the extra man and exploited the gap in the visiting defence to dive over the line. This try capped a fine performance for Woodhams making only his fourth senior start in his new position, which he looks likely to cement as his own for several seasons to come.

Turning around 8-0 ahead at the break, the home side expected an onslaught from their in form visitors who have won five of their last seven league games to move themselves into mid table. The Kings' Coughton men were however handed an early boost in the second period. The Manor Park forwards were first to react to their own kickers restart and won possession of the ball which was moved to their left to begin the attack through their back line. The visiting outside centre attempted to find his left wing, but instead found Alcester right wing Stuart Whitehead who managed to intercept the pass low down and between his legs, before quickly assuming his sprinting position and racing clear of the defence to score from inside his own half. This was a brilliant finish by Alcester's quickest player, on the day of his 24th birthday.

Predictably the visitors came back into the game, as their forwards upped several gears to become much more of a threat to the home eight. They forced a penalty to

open their own account, thanks to their kicker's successful conversion of the three point chance, before a sustained period of pressure near the Alcester line culminated in a try for the visitors, which the visiting kicker also converted.

The home side stemmed the tide of the Nuneaton outfit's attacking intent, but when the two penalties that Alcester forced were kicked and missed the visitors sensed a victory and revenge for their opponents 12-9 win in Nuneaton earlier in the season.

The home side were forced to withstand a period of sustained pressure near their own line but the fact that they held out seemed to spur them on and they sought to close out the remaining ten minutes of the game through their forwards who kept it tight and rucked and mauled their way through the closing stages. The visitors managed to retrieve turnover ball in the dying seconds and home hearts were in their mouths as the ball was spun quickly left and Manor Park were left with a four on two player advantage just inside the Alcester half. The ball made it to their left wing and he took on Alcester's Whitehead on the outside and looked to have rounded him before the home man of the match pulled off a superb tackle to force his man in to touch, for the last action of the game.

This important win moves Alcester up a place in the league. They take a break from league action next week as they host the annual visit of the University of Birmingham Medical Students "the Medics" for their usual fun and frolics and their traditional "fresher" initiation following the game. Kick off at Kings Coughton is 2pm.