

## **ALCESTER RFC MATCH REPORTS**

**Saturday 26th September**

**Midlands Division Four West (South East)**

**Alcester 53 Stoke Old Boys 10**

Alcester made a superb start to the league campaign following last year's promotion, with a comprehensive victory over their generally heavier and more experienced opponents from Coventry.

The Old Boys were held up on A46 on route to Alcester and arrived late, which meant that the kick off was put back until 3.15pm. The additional preparation time the home side enjoyed, definitely helped them and they raced into an early lead with an opening try inside 30 seconds. Diminutive open side flanker Jim Watson capitalised on a mistake in the visitors defence to gather the loose ball and cross the line.

Playing with the sun and slope at their back, the visitors enjoyed their fair share of territory in the opening period, and with their bigger pack on top at the scrum, they also had plenty of possession. They had little answer, however, to Alcester at second and third phase competition, with the home pack turning their opponents over on countless occasions throughout the afternoon and dealing relatively comfortably with Stoke's "route one" game plan of their big forwards off the side of rucks.

The visitors did get points on the board with their conversion of a second penalty opportunity, but only after Alcester's Max Bitcliffe had increased his side's lead with one of his two penalty shots at the posts.

Left wing Stuart Whitehead improved his side's score with a second try for the Kings Coughton men, with Bitcliffe converting well, before the kicker added two further well taken penalties from three opportunities, giving his side a healthy looking lead as half time approached.

The game took a turn in favour of the visitors, however in the dying stages of the half. First, try scorer Watson was sent to the sin bin for what the exchange referee deemed to be a dangerous tackle. Then, on the stroke of half time, Stoke elected to run a penalty awarded deep inside the home twenty two and after they managed to recycle possession from three rucks formed during various attempts at the line, their scrum half dived over under the posts, despite the attentions of Alcester full back Tom Burgess. Burgess and the Stoke try scorer exchanged pleasantries on the floor following the score, which prompted a brief mass melee involving players from both sides. When calm had been restored, the two original instigators followed Watson to the sin bin, leaving 14 playing 13 as the sides turned around for half time.

There were no further scores during the period that both sides were reduced in numbers, but when parity was restored, Alcester resumed their stranglehold on the game, particularly because they had by now steadied their scrum and were beginning to get a regular flow of possession from the line out. It was from a throw in, on the visitor's five metre line, that they increased their lead. Hooker Brett Allard found front jumper Pat Lamb and the home pack drove on to the line, with lock Andy Flynn in possession of the ball at the back of the maul as they crashed over for a good forwards try.

After this score, the older legs of the visitors seemed to tire in the warm autumn sunshine, and the home backs, set free by half back pairing Robbie Parker and Andy Smith, who both had excellent games, enjoyed the space around them to play some sparkling rugby.

Flanker Watson joined the line on one backs move to double his try count, before kicker Bitcliffe added to his points from the boot, with a try of his own. Full back Tom Burgess scored the try of the game, with a brilliant individual run after receiving the ball inside his own half. Burgess dummied, shimmied and motored his way to the try line, in a run that took him past several opponents on route.

Centre Sean Sudworth completed the scoring with a determined, straight but diagonal run through the gaps in the visitors defence. Bitcliffe converted three of the five second half tries.

Coach Steve Lea was rightly delighted with the performance of his side, and in particular the “young pups” of the late teens and early twenties brigade, who played such a prominent part in this win. In addition to Watson, Biltcliffe, Burgess and Sudworth, all of whom got on the score sheet, back rower Ed Hartley enjoyed an excellent all round game, as did replacement blind side Andy Trigg who put in an important little cameo performance in the last quarter of the contest. Wings Mike Badoud and Stuart Whitehead did some of their best work in defence, as in attack they were not called into action as much as the score line may suggest, as most of Alcester’s ground was made in midfield rather than out wide.

Lea and injured club captain Scott Carmichael, face some interesting selection dilemmas in the weeks ahead, when the captain himself is available, alongside two or three or three of the usual regulars who did not feature in this game.

Alcester take a break from league action next week, when they visit old adversaries Birmingham Civil Service for a friendly.