

## **ALCESTER RFC MATCH REPORTS**

**Saturday 3th April 2010**

**Midlands Division Four West (South)**

**Alcester 11 Coventry Welsh 14**

Alcester slipped to defeat in their final league home game of the season, against a promotion chasing Coventry Welsh side that completed the double over their hosts in the process, following two tight games this season. The Welsh men overcame their opponents by only seven points across both fixtures, following an equally narrow 9-5 win in Holbrooks earlier in the season.

An already much changed Alcester side to the one that were victors over Rugby Welsh the previous week, were dealt several selection blows on Friday evening and Saturday morning, with no fewer than four key players withdrawing through illness, injury and work commitments. Despite this, their deputies all played key roles in a good all round team performance in conditions that deteriorated badly throughout the afternoon.

With the slope in the first half, Alcester started brightest and after a period of pressure in the opening quarter, left wing James Woodhams crossed for the first score, despite being under severe pressure as he crossed and a suspicion of a knock on in the act of scoring. From wide out fly half Martin Gurr missed the conversion, before fairing better with a well struck penalty midway through the half, to give his side an 8-0 lead. Alcester looked to have been dealt a blow when talismanic skipper, Scott Carmichael had to leave the field with a cut on his forehead. He was briefly replaced by substitute Robbie Parker, although a patched up Carmichael soon returned to lead his side.

Around the half hour mark, the bright spring conditions disappeared and the heavens opened on to an already soft ground under foot, which made any free flowing rugby an near impossibility. Sensing that their chances would come in the second half with the elements at their back, the visitors chose to run the clock down in the half with a forwards oriented pick and drive game. Alcester defended this well, but still conceded two penalties within kickable range, one of which was converted well by the visitor's fly half, in now very poor kicking conditions.

Turning around 8-3 behind, the visitors reduced the deficit right from the restart, as Alcester impeded at a maul having gathered the kick. The Welsh no 10 slotted over his second penalty of the afternoon to bring his side within two points.

Try scorer Woodhams was replaced by Parker, as the home side used the first of their three substitutions. With the rain still falling and Alcester defending the boggiest part of the pitch, most of the third quarter of the game was played deep in home territory with the hosts struggling to clear their lines. Despite this they defended resolutely in the mud against a series of determined drives towards their line, but in the end they simply ran out of numbers. With defenders sucked in to the rear guard effort, the ball made a rare move wide to the spare Welsh man on the right wing, to score.

From the restart, Alcester managed to stem the tide and took play in to the Welsh half for the first real sustained period of time for well over ten minutes. With the driving wind and rain at their back, the Welsh backs used every opportunity to boot on ball and simply move play back in to the Alcester half, and in the standing water it “died” on impact with the ground, making it difficult for the home defenders to gather. In their attempts to clear their lines, the home side conceded another penalty within range, and the visitor’s kicker sent over another good strike in the circumstances, to move his side 14-8 in front.

By now Alcester had made their final two replacements with Dave Marriott replacing Phil Birks, who had given another typically battling performance. Marriott bulked up the second row, allowing Pat Lamb to take Birks’ berth in the back row for the remainder of the game. Player coach Steve Lea also entered the action, as the home side sought to shore up their scrum, in the final quarter.

With time running down, Alcester enjoyed their best spell of the half, but all attempts on both lines had to come from tight drives, as any chance of running rugby was nullified by the conditions. The home side forced a penalty as the Welsh defence clung on at a ruck, and Gurr sent over another kick to bring his side back within three points.

Try as they might, the home side couldn’t force another scoring opportunity and the joyous reaction of the visitors at the final whistle, was a compliment to a gutsy performance by an under strength Alcester side.

The Welsh men’s promotion charge continues following this result, whilst Alcester prepare for their final league game of the season against another Coventry side, Stoke Old Boys. Kick off in Coventry is 3pm.