

Saturday 20th January 2007 – Friendly

Opposition : Birmingham Civil Service

With a break from league action, Alcester took the opportunity to rest half of their first XV and to give four younger players an opportunity to shine in the senior side. This "gamble" came within seconds of coming off, as the visitors won with a last play penalty kick, which was hard on the home side who had enjoyed the better of things for most of the afternoon.

The elements dictated that this was always going to be the proverbial game of two halves, and so it proved, as Alcester elected to play down the slope with the strong breeze at their backs. They took the lead early on, via a familiar method. Phil Birks took clean ball in the middle of the line out, and the home pack got the driving maul on towards the line, culminating in tight head Nev Teasdale crashing over from the back of the drive. 17 year old fly half, Jamie Randall converted well. Teasdale was forced to leave the field before the end of the half with a rib injury and Jeff Williams replaced him.

The home side retained the ascendancy but they had to wait for the closing stages of the half to add to their score, thanks to two tries from full back Chris Hall, making a welcome return to action after a period of unavailability. The first came from a well worked penalty move which featured quick thinking from scrum half Dom Skinner and a great miss pass from stand in skipper and inside centre Matt Gwynn, the second a brilliant touchline hugging finish from the Alcester number 15. Randall narrowly failed to convert both from wide out, but he had shown enough in the first half with his all round play, as had that of his fellow youngsters, Rupert Daffern and Jason Richings on the wings and James Woodhams in the centre, to offer real promise for the future.

With the visitors having the benefit of the elements, the home side knew they had to start well defensively, however they couldn't put this plan in to action, as Civil Service scored under the posts from the first move of the half. Their fly half converted, having missed a first half penalty, which was their only real attacking threat up until now. With their tails up and the wind at their backs, the men from Birmingham were a different proposition in the second half, and their big pack, whilst generally coming off second best to the home eight, did enough to secure most of their own ball from scrum and line out, whilst rarely threatening on Alcester ball. The visitors pegged the score back further with a penalty, before Alcester regained the upper hand and enjoyed a fifteen minute spell played mainly in the visitors half. They had to work to keep the ball there, however, as the wind ensured that even the deftest of touches to the ball, took play down the slope and deep into Alcester territory. Despite their domination the King's Coughton men couldn't add to their score, and when Civil Service were able to sustain a period of possession in Alcester territory, it was no surprise when they ran in their second try, to move within two points of their hosts.

The visitors sniffed an unlikely victory, and upped the tempo, camping in their opponents half for the final five minutes. Great defence from the home side, in which the younger players all figured prominently, kept their bigger opponents at bay, until with time nearly having run out, the Alcester midfield strayed offside right under the posts as the ball was spun wide from a ruck won by the visitors. As the referee informed both sides that the resulting penalty kick was the last play, the Civil Service fly half took the simplest of opportunities to slot over and claim the win for the visitors.

Alcester return to important league business next Saturday and a visit to promotion rivals Southam, where they are hoping to gain revenge for their only league home defeat of the season earlier in the term.

Result : Alcester 17 – Birmingham Civil Service 18