

Saturday 13th January 2007 – League

Opposition : Rugby St. Andrews

Alcester extended their eight match unbeaten run with an all round excellent showing and a commanding first half performance against the side they have now replaced in second spot in the league. In fact the last team to beat them were Rugby St Andrews, and the home side were in determined mood to show their opponents that they were very much on an off day when they were handed their heaviest defeat of the season so far, in East Warwickshire in mid November. Skipper Scott Carmichael once again showed his side the way with a well taken hat trick of scores, to cement his position at the top of the club's try count this term.

Starting with the slope and with the strong wind at their backs, the red and blacks made their now customary good start at home and were in front inside the opening ten minutes. They were awarded a put in at a scrum only ten metres out, and the home eight set the tone for the afternoon in shunting the visitors back towards their own line. As the scrum crossed the try line it wheeled slightly and scrum half Carmichael took charge at the base to pick up and dive over from close range.

Within five minutes they had extended their lead, as the visiting eight struggled to contain the power of the Alcester pack. This time the source of the score came from the line out, and after secure ball had been taken in the middle by flanker Phil Birks, the Alcester forwards drove quickly in field and towards the line, allowing hooker Dickie Moore to double his try tally for the season from the back of the maul. Outside centre Andy Smith converted.

It continued to be one way traffic for most of the remainder of the half. Carmichael scored his second and his side's third try, burrowing over from a ruck that had formed near the line, following another driven line out. Smith again converted.

They also went close on a few occasions to no avail, most noticeably when player coach and tight head prop, Steve Lea, gathered a stray defensive clearance from the visiting full back, on the right hand touch line before being afforded what seemed like the freedom of King's Coughton by the St Andrews defence, as he galloped thirty metres towards the line, only being hauled down three metres short and just failing to get his pass away to his team mates in support.

Alcester did score one more try, just before the break, when the replacement visiting second row, received the ball deep inside his own twenty two, seemingly panicked and broke one of the cardinal rules of forward play in attempting to kick clear, only succeeding to hit home left wing Andy Jones in the chest. Jones followed up his own charge down to pounce on the loose ball that had rolled back over the line. Smith narrowly missed the conversion from wide out.

Alcester turned around at the break 24-0 to the good, but they have been playing Saints for long enough to know that their opponents were capable of coming back at them, and in fairness to the visitors backs they showed enough with what little ball they did get in the first half, to remind any doubters of their talents.

The second half started quietly as both sides settled into very different game plans now the benefit of the conditions had changed in favour of St Andrews. Much more of the game was played in the Alcester half, as the visiting backs followed the lead of their Alcester counterparts in the opening period, in putting boot to ball and letting the wind take the play downfield. They were not as accurate as the red and blacks Matt Gwynn and Andy Smith had been in finding touch, however, and the King's Coughton men's back three of try scorer Jones, full back Robbie Parker and right wing Dominic Skinner all were faultless under the swirling high kicks. When the ball did make it out of play, the Saints line out was scrappy, which coupled with the complete domination of the scrum by the home eight, meant that the visitors possession was severely restricted. When they did get the ball they tried to move the bigger and older Alcester pack around, but despite six of the eight being 36 years plus, and four of them the wrong side of forty, there are some that are no mean slouches in "Dad's Army" and they were able to get to the breakdowns quickly to compete with their mostly younger opponents. In fact many of the Alcester pack demonstrated their agility with ball in hand in open play, not least in lock Dave Marriott's case, who showed his

ever improving fitness to receive numerous pop balls from his half backs, to crash into the Saints midfield and create gaps for his side to exploit throughout the afternoon.

The second half was a much more open affair, and although Alcester still enjoyed the upper hand, their defence was breached as the visiting backs demonstrated how dangerous they could be by running in a break away try from their own half to score under the posts, allowing an easy conversion.

Alcester stamped out any thought of a Saints fight back, thanks to Carmichael's hat trick score, fifteen minutes from time, which was a carbon copy of the first try as he gathered and dived over from a scrum that had progressed to the visitors try line from five metres out.

The King's Coughton men now find themselves in the thick of a promotion fight, thanks to this comprehensive win over one of the league's form sides. This is a welcome change for Alcester who have been involved in the end of season scrap for points at the wrong end of the table, all too often in recent seasons. They face a break from league action next week, when they will take the opportunity to rest a number of their 1st XV, whilst the remainder join forces with the second team for an "A" fixture, against opponents that are still to be confirmed.

Result : Alcester 29 – Rugby St. Andrews 7