

Saturday 6th January 2006 – League

Opposition : Upton–on–Severn

In what is fast becoming the season that will be remembered for its exceptionally wet and boggy conditions, in probably the worst so far, the sides fought out a evenly contested draw in what was more of a mud bath rather than a free flowing rugby spectacle.

Despite having comfortably beaten their hosts in their first meeting at King's Coughton in late November, Alcester knew that that Upton would be a totally different proposition at home, and they didn't disappoint, demonstrating why they have lost only one of their five home league starts before this match.

The key to Alcester's victory in their home game was the total domination of the scrum by the red and blacks pack which saw them score three push over tries, and it looked like this was to be a repeat performance, when inside the opening ten minutes, Alcester took the lead thanks to a Nick O'Connor try, after he picked up and dived over from the base of a scrum that had charged over the home line from seven metres out. Andy Smith converted, having previously just dropped short a penalty kick at goal in the opening minutes.

Alcester continued to have the upper hand in the scrum, but a combination of the poor conditions, different personnel and improved application by the home side ensured that this was not the overwhelming domination they had enjoyed in November. In fact the visitors were disrupted when regular tight head Steve Lunn had to leave the field with the recurrence of an ankle injury, to be replaced by Nev Teasdale from the 2nd XV pitch. This proved to be more of a problem at the line out, where without their regular line out lifters in Lunn and his fellow prop in the front row Matt Bolton, who was absent this week, the home side were enjoying the better of things, which was their main source of possession allowing them to come back in to the game.

By now Upton had already levelled the scores after a period of pressure, when their big right wing waltzed through several half hearted Alcester tackles to score under the posts and shortly after Teasdale's arrival to the action, they took the lead when they outnumbered Alcester wide out left, allowing their wing to score in the corner.

After a bad twenty minutes, Alcester finished the half on top, and with another penalty award following pressure on the home pack at the scrum, Smith struck his kick sweetly leaving his side only two points down at 12–10 at the break.

The opening stages of the half belonged to Alcester, and after having gone close on a couple of occasions with forward drives near the home line, they were awarded a penalty only a few metres out, which skipper and scrum half Scott Carmichael took quickly, to blast his way over the line. Smith converted well.

In full credit to Upton they belied their lowly league position to come back strongly at the King's Coughton men, and when they narrowly missed scoring in the corner, after the home linesman sportingly signalled to the unsighted referee that his player had been knocked in touch by a combination of O'Connor and right wing Andy Jones in the act of scoring, Alcester were awarded a line out in a dangerous position only five metres from their line. Their off day in this normally strong area of their play was confirmed, the Alcester pack didn't react to hooker Dickie Moore's call for middle ball, leading to it being spilt back over their own line. One of the Upton second row forwards reacted quickest to the loose ball to level the scores.

In the closing stages both sides had chances to win the game, but in the end had to settle for a draw, which was the fair result, giving Alcester a point which moves them clear in third place in the league. They now face a possibly season defining game next Saturday with the visit of second placed Rugby St Andrews to King's Coughton, where they are hoping to eradicate the memory of their worst performance of the season so far, which saw them suffer their heaviest defeat of the campaign in the first meeting between the two sides earlier in the season.

Result : Upton 17 – Alcester 17