

Saturday 16th December 2006 – League

Opposition : Woodrush

Alcester continued their rich vein of form with a fourth successive win, but this was by far their best victory of the campaign so far, as they saw off the potent threat of the league leaders without conceding a point, to put themselves firmly in the promotion shake up at the mid point of the league season. Despite now being joint second in the league table they somewhat cruelly actually slipped a position to fourth after Rugby St Andrews thumping win in Coventry, meant that Alcester have the lowest for and against total of the three teams tied on 12 points. Having said that nothing can take away from one of Alcester's best days for many seasons.

Alcester started up the slope and playing into the bright and sunny conditions, in front of the largest crowd of the season so far, thanks in part to the travelling numbers from the Wythall area added to the home side's healthy following. That and the tense conditions that the game was played in for most of the afternoon, made for an excellent atmosphere, and the spectators were treated to a very even and keenly fought game, which was actually scoreless at the break. Both sides did have chance to put points on the board in the first half, however, with both nervy kickers missing two penalty opportunities at goal, and in addition the try scoring opportunities were shared, as the visitors were hauled back for offside when a charged down kick left a visiting back with a clear run to the line, before Alcester went close on two occasions when they somewhat needlessly gave away penalties at maul situation when the home pack had the roll on towards the line. One of the visitors penalty attempts came just a few minutes before half time from the same incident which saw home no 8 Nick O'Connor sin binned for illegal use of the boot at a ruck.

Despite turning around after half time with the slope and sun at their backs, Alcester played the opening minutes with only fourteen men with O'Connor still in the bin, but they still enjoyed the better of things and forced another kickable penalty opportunity after the green and whites had been penalised for offside. Andy Smith struck his kick well, but it bounced off the right hand upright and into the grateful arms of a visiting defender who was able to move the ball to clear. O'Connor returned to the field shortly afterwards and the even, feisty nature of the game continued with defences well on top.

Midway through the half the deadlock was finally broken when Smith took his fourth penalty opportunity from approximately 40 yards in front of the posts, after the Woodrush hooker had been yellow carded following a late tackle on home skipper and scrum half Scott Carmichael.

Now it was the visitors turn to play a man short, although Alcester were not able to drive home their advantage at the scrum as the sin binning brought passive scrummaging with the Woodrush front row replacement already on the field following an injury. Instead Alcester were making good progress from their driving mauls at line outs, and they got the crucial first try whilst the visitors were still a man down. Flanker Phil Birks took one of a number of towering takes in the centre of the line out, and the home pack got the shunt on deep inside the visiting twenty two. The maul rolled on well and maintained momentum allowing hooker Dickie Moore to direct events from the back of his pack and crash over the line for his first score of the season. Smith brilliantly converted from wide out to give his side a ten points cushion.

As befits a side leading the league, the visitors came back strongly and threw everything at Alcester, but they were met with an equally determined red and black defensive wall, which refused to let them through. Woodrush were presented with two more penalty opportunities which were again both missed, and with time running out and his side now well on top in the set phases up front, Alcester fly half Matt Gwynn's intelligent right foot prods down field kept play mostly in the green and white's territory. The home side looked dangerous every time they were able to get the mauls going from the line out and in the dying minutes they got a second try, again following a Birks clean line out take and rolling maul, which player coach Steve Lea, on a as a half time substitute for tight head Steve Lunn, crashed over from.

Alcester celebrated a great victory at the whistle, knowing that their last league outing of the year will be hard to better when they resume their league campaign at Upton on Severn in the New Year.

Result : Alcester 15 – Woodrush 0

