

# Narrow opening day defeat for Woking RFC

## Raynes Park RFC 25 vs Woking RFC 24

Woking RFC started their 23/24 Surrey Counties 5 league campaign with an agonising defeat away to Raynes Park. Despite losing skipper Jacob Woods to illness on the eve of the match, Woking under new Head Coach Mark Rose and with several new faces in the match day squad went into the tough season opener confident that all the hard work over summer would see them perform well.



Unfortunately, such optimism proved short lived as from the kick off Woking found themselves on the back foot with their kick off going straight into touch. With a clear game plan of utilising their large pack to keep the game tight and dominate the set pieces Raynes Park dominated the visitors in the early exchanges. Struggling in the scrums Woking conceded multiple penalties which allowed the hosts to camp on the Woking line. Despite some brave defence Raynes Park drove over for a converted try.

Not long after, more indiscipline saw Woking reduced to 14 men as debutant Jawad Sobhani saw yellow for cynically denying a try scoring opportunity for not retreating. Raynes Park opted for the scrum and went over. Conversion missed.

Slowly Woking were able to move up the pitch thanks to the efforts of stand in skipper Chris Wallis, John Dickie, and Jordan Baker. However, as a team Woking were struggling to find any cohesion or rhythm to their play. As the half approached its conclusion and no sooner had Woking returned to full strength Raynes Park were awarded a penalty try as Alasdair Hamilton-Wilkes infringed at the line out denying another try scoring opportunity.

With time running out Woking found some much-needed urgency and got themselves within 15m of the Raynes Park goal line. As the host conceded a penalty, quick thing by scrum half Chris Wallis saw him tap and go, catching several defenders off guard to go in under the posts. Aitcheson converted.

### **Half time: Raynes Park RFC 19 - 7 Woking RFC**

Following the confidence boosting try before the break and some instruction from head coach Mark Rose Woking came out a different team. They upped their intensity and started to play to their strengths of spreading the ball wide to stretch the game and run the much larger Raynes Park pack around.

The match was much more evenly balanced. Raynes Park were struggling to contain the pace and direct running of the Woking back line. Centre Jordan Baker was proving to be a handful along with full back Keihlan Watson who was running everything back when the opportunity presented itself.

Woking scored their second try following good defensive play which saw the ball bounce fortunately from a tackle for Baker who collected cleanly and managed to hold off the covering defenders to score from 30m out. Watson added the conversion.

With the game in the balance Woking conceded a penalty that Raynes Park converted before more good play by Mike Aitcheson saw him make a break to feed Chris Wallis in support who managed take the ball up field before a quick one two with Aitcheson that saw him score his second of the game. Aitcheson converted. Both sides exchanged penalties meaning it was now a one-point game.

As Raynes Park looked to see out the game Woking were running out of time to get the decisive score and seal a dramatic comeback win. With just a couple of minutes left the Woking pack did well to turnover the ball which gave the backs a platform to attack from depth. Good hands again saw the ball end up wide to Jordan Baker who drew the last defender and feed the overlapping Keihlan Watson only for the pass to be adjudged as forward.

However, Woking were given an unexpected opportunity to win the game as the Raynes Park forwards conceded a late penalty as they looked to manage the final play of the game. Facing his final and most difficult kick of the day Mike Aitcheson stepped up only to drag his effort wide much to the relief of Raynes Park.

Watching from the sideline skipper Jacob Woods said, 'The passion and determination the boys showed to get back in the game was immense. After a challenging start with everything going against them, they showed real character to drag themselves back into contention when not playing well. The truth is they were unlucky to be on the losing side as we dominated the second half. If we get our act together and play to our full potential, we are going to surprise a lot of teams this season'.

### **Final score: Raynes Park RFC 25 - 24 Woking RFC**

Man of the Match: Jordan Baker

# Home Sweet Home as Woking enjoy secure first win of season

## Woking RFC 44 vs Mitcham & Carshalton 3

Woking RFC enjoyed a winning return to Byfleet Rec as they ran in 4 tries in each half to defeat a spirited Mitcham and Carshalton side. Having narrowly lost the seasoner opener the hosts were determined to claim their first victory of the season.



The early exchanges were evenly contested with the visitors shading it as Woking indiscipline once again allowed their opponents to gain good field position without ever really threatening the Woking line. As the half went on the Woking pack began to get the upper hand which enabled them to bring their back line into play.

Midway through the half Woking debutant Matt Grimes kicked deep into the Mitcham 22m to collect his own kick as the defender failed to deal with the bouncing ball. A few minutes later Mitcham reduced the deficit with a well taken drop goal following a period of sustained pressure where the home defence held firm.

Woking came back strongly and dominated the remainder of the half with flanker Josh Claydon sprinting over following some strong running. Debutant Carl Jacobz also crossed from close range as Mitcham struggled to contain their hosts which was quickly followed by a further not long after by second row and man of the match Kieran Williamson.

### Half time: Woking RFC 22 - 3 Mitcham & Carshalton

Woking started the second half as they finished the first, from the restart Mitcham failed to deal with the kick enabling Josh Claydon to collect the restart before feeding Chris Wallis to score under the posts. Mitcham defended resolutely without ever really threatening the Woking half, only gaining ground from the occasional infringement.

Skipper Jacob Woods was the next to score, collecting the ball from a set lineout move to break the defensive line 40m out and charge through to score leaving the covering defenders in his wake. Mike

Aitchison set up Chris Swan with a well-paced cross field kick that the winger collected to out sprint his opponent to score in the corner. Chris Wallis completed the scoring with another well worked try following good phase play between forwards and backs.

After the game Head Coach Mark Rose said, 'It's great to get the first win and there are a lot of positives and improvements from last week. Our penalty count is still far too high and something we need to work on. We have a few players who picked up knocks so we will say how that impacts the squad over the week before our trip to Croydon RFC next week'.

**Final score: Woking RFC 44 - 3 Mitcham & Carshalton RFC**

**Man of the Match:** Kieran Williamson



# ALL ROUND TEAM PERFORMANCE SECURES BONUS POINT WIN

## Merton RFC 22 vs Woking RFC 24

Woking travelled up the A3 to visit familiar opposition in Merton RFC. Despite some of the lop-sided results when the two sides have met in the last couple of years, this match from the offset looked like it would be one of the hard-fought battles separated by a couple of points that this fixture has often thrown up and it did not disappoint.



Woking kicked off with the slope and from the start put pressure on their hosts. Merton in a bid to slow the game down ended up giving Woking several penalties which allowed the visitors to build from set piece. However, Woking failed to capitalise, and it was Merton who struck first with Woking conceding a couple of sloppy penalties which allowed the home side to get up field and within range for a shot at goal to open the scoring 3-0.

Not allowing their heads to drop, Woking went back downfield and continued to pressure the Merton defence with strong running from the back row of Phil Price, Josh Claydon and Jacob Woods as well as the threat in the backline from Carl Jacobz and Keilhan Watson. This soon paid dividends with a grubber through a gap from Jacobz was hacked on by Price and then missed by the Merton fullback which allowed Price to score. The conversion was missed making it 5-3 to Woking.

Woking continued their pressure and a penalty from a scrum at close range allowed Jacob Woods to take a tap and crash over making the score 10-3. Merton hit back immediately with some strong work through their forwards to bring the score back to 10 each.

It was almost Merton who went into half time leading when a dangerous break by their wing looked to be a certain try, however heroic cover defence from Oscar Dower, Jawad Sobhani and Finn Rowe got Woking into half time with honours even.

### **Half-time: Merton 10 - 10 Woking**

Playing up hill second half, Woking knew it would be a challenge. However, both forwards and backs stepped up to the mark. Not much could divide the sides in the first 15 minutes until a stroke of individual brilliance from fullback Watson saw him rip the Merton defence apart and score under the posts, the conversion was added to take the score to 17-10. Merton quickly hit back after some soft defence due to tired legs allowed Merton to dot down in the corner taking the score to 17-15.

This was a wakeup call for Woking who went up field and camped on the Merton line. A penalty for an infringement at a scrum was taken quickly by scrum half Rhys Parker who fed Captain Woods to take advantage of the static Merton defence to grab his second score of the afternoon. Keihlan Watson took the score with the conversion to 24-15.

The last ten minutes were a desperate effort from both sides to grab the win. For a large part it looked like Merton were going to do it after grabbing a try to bring the score back to 24-22. The hosts continued to be camped on the Woking line and when they conceded a penalty in front of the posts the game seemed up.

A shot at goal would have taken Merton into the lead, however to Woking's surprise their enthusiastic second row took a quick tap penalty. Not only was he held up over the line, but he also failed to tap the ball which resulted in a Woking free kick and despair for the Merton players and supporters alike.

A Woking clearance found an isolated Merton winger who was surrounded by Keiron Hale, Josh Claydon and Rhys Parker and had no choice but to hold on and concede a penalty. Woking cleared even further up field and after the lineout won another penalty for Merton infringements at the ruck. After being camped in their own 22 for much of the last ten minutes, Woking ended the game in the opposition 22 with Rhys Parker putting the ball dead for full time and the win.

Jacob Woods commented after the game: "Just what we needed as a side. Everyone stood up as individuals today and played as a team for the win. If we can maintain a consistent side selection and build on the hard work at training, I have no doubt more wins will come".

### **Full-time: Merton 22 - 24 Woking**

**Man of the Match:** Kieran Hale for an all-round dominant display in defence and crucial turnovers at the ruck.

# COMPREHENSIVE WIN BUT PLENTY OF ROOM FOR IMPROVEMNT SAYS WOODS.

## Woking RFC 53 vs Wandsworthians RFC 10

Woking secured back-to-back league wins for the first time in 5 seasons as they ran in nine tries to see off Wandsworthians RFC at Byfleet Rec. The hosts backed up their win away at Merton the previous week to consolidate their position in the top half of Surrey Counties 5.



On a perfect afternoon for rugby the hosts scored within the first 30 seconds as Josh Claydon collected the kick off and lead the charge forward. Woking recycled several phases before releasing their backs to devastating effect which saw full back Keihlan Watson receiving the ball out wide to cruise in unopposed. Mark Rose converted.

From the restart almost identical play saw skipper Jacob Woods receive the ball in midfield and punch a hole through Wandsworthians defence. Quick recycling again by the Woking pack allowed Mark Rose to send the ball out wide again with centre Carl Jacobz on hand to finish off in style out wide.

Having started with such intensity and purpose the large home crowd could be forgiven for expecting more of the same. However, Wandsworthians grew into the game as Woking indiscipline led to them conceding penalties which gave the visitors a platform to gain field position and put their hosts under pressure. This led to Wandsworthians enjoying their best period of the game and despite committed home defence Woking conceded two quick tries that made it a one score game.

The remainder of the first half was stop start as a series of stoppages for injuries and indiscipline from both sides meant Woking lost the fluidity and tempo from their game which had been so successful in the opening exchanges. On the stroke of half-time good play by the Woking pack lead to another penalty 5 meters out. From the resulting tap, skipper Woods crossed the whitewash only to uncharacteristically fumble as he went to put the ball down.

#### **Half-time: Woking 12 - 10 Wandsworthians**

Not happy with the way the first half had gone the home side were keen to put things right and get back to the standards they had set earlier. With the luxury of having a strong bench coach Mark Rose was able to rotate his squad.

Not long after the restart more good phase play between forwards and backs created the opportunity for Watson to score his second of the afternoon. This was followed by a two tries each from winger Jake Sines and centre Finlay Rowe. The latter scoring his first points for the club.

Further Wandsworthians indiscipline resulted in a yellow card for a high tackle which Woking took full advantage of as Watson and Jacobz grabbed another try each. Not to be out done the Woking pack got on the scoresheet with the ninth and final try from John Dickie who went in unopposed from just a couple of meters out following a ruck. Rose successfully converted 3 of the 7 second half tries.

After the match captain Jacob Woods said, "It was great to build on last week's victory and despite doing our best to level things up in the first half the boys regrouped to put in the best performance of the season so far. It is great to know we have plenty of room for improvement and it was great to welcome back some injured players and more fresh faces. We now turn our focus to a tough away fixture away at London French with the goal to go the month unbeaten"

#### **Full-time: Woking 53 – 10 Wandsworthians**

**Man of the Match:** Finlay Rowe for two tries and all action display in defence and attack.



# WINNING RUN COMES TO AN END DURING FEISTY ENCOUNTER

## London French RFC 32 vs Woking RFC 3

Woking RFC failed to make it a hat trick of Surrey Counties 5 victories as they came out second best to London French in Barnes. With both sides level on points in the league Woking travelled with confidence having won their previous two matches, although frustratingly were only able to name a squad of 16 due to injury and unavailability.



Woking kicked off but was the hosts who took control of the early exchanges as they looked to move the ball out wide at every opportunity. However, solid Woking defence and poor handling from the London French backline in tricky conditions meant the early storm was weathered without too much of a scare.

Gradually, the Woking forwards started to get on top dominating the scrums and winning penalties at the breakdown thanks to good play from the back row of Jake Sines, Jacob Woods, and Josh Claydon. However, for all the good work and getting into their opponent's half it was undone by Woking's inability to win their own line out ball at crucial times. Things got worse when Woking lost back row Jake Sines to ankle injury which led to another reshuffle of the pack.

Mid way through the half the French scored their first try through a combination of some good interplay between forwards and backs as well as some poor Woking defence. The conversion was missed but a penalty was added a couple of minutes later to extend the lead of the French.

Fired up Woking enjoyed their best period of the half as skipper Woods and player of the match Josh Claydon along with prop Joe Griggs took the fight to the French with some hard and direct carries that punched holes in their opponent's defence. As the pressure-built London French conceded a penalty in front of the posts for offside at the ruck and Mark Rose obliged to get Woking on the board.

On the stroke of half time Woking conceded again as a more good interplay between forwards and backs kept the ball away from the strength of the Woking pack and resulted in a third try.

### **Half-time: London French 15 - 3 Woking**

Woking tried to take the game to their opponents at the start of the second half but much like the first half their dominance in the scrums was being negated by their inability to now win any line out ball. Up front Woking were more than holding their own and frustrating the opposing pack. At times this boiled over with late tackles and off the ball incidents which were going unnoticed by both sides. As Woking tired, unable to enjoy the depth of bench they had available in previous weeks, London French took advantage to throw the ball around and score two more tries. With several players continuing to play through injury Woking were struggling to contain their younger and fitter opponents, who themselves had the luxury of a lengthy bench which enabled them to rotate players at will.

Undeterred and lead by Woods, Rose and Claydon Woking got into their opponent's half and whilst causing problems they never really threatened the French try line, either conceding possession or field position through mistakes, indiscipline or as a result of good defence.

With ten minutes remaining Woking were reduced 14 men as Wilkes saw red for retaliation for something that happened as a scrum broke up. London French took advantage of the extra player scoring a final try as Woking failed to deal with a kick in behind.

At the end, reflecting on the match Woking skipper Jacob Woods said, 'Today wasn't a true reflection of our quality and I am disappointed. With key players missing or unavailable the boys who played today gave everything, but it wasn't enough. We have a week off now to recover and get ready for our final 2 fixtures before the Christmas break. We have already exceed our points tally for last season so we have made some huge steps forward to be pleased with.'

### **Full-time: London French 32 - 3 Woking**

**Man of the Match:** Josh Claydon

# WOKING HOLD ON FOR HARD FOUGHT VICTORY

## WOKING RFC 29 vs EGHAM HOLLOWEGIANS RFC 22

Woking were back in action at home looking to return to winning ways after defeat at London French and the cancellation of the Old Suttonians fixture the week before. With Egham and Woking neck and neck in the Surrey Counties 5 league table, the winner would consolidate 4th place going into the Christmas break.



Still missing several players through injury and unavailability Woking were still able to name a strong looking squad. Woking looked dangerous early on and this showed when a counterattack from deep resulted in a try for full back Keilhan Watson. Shortly after flanker Josh Claydon made a broke through the Egham midfield only to be brought down shortly before the line, a quick recycle of the ball allowed scrum half Matt Ralph to cross over for the second. Mark Rose converted from a tricky angle to make it 12-0 to the hosts.

Egham came back into the game after this and after several Woking infringements, took the penalty in front of the posts for 3 points. The game was evenly balanced for the remainder of the half with both sides committed yet unable to get a real advantage in the wet and blustery conditions. This stalemate was broken just before half time with another fine counterattack from full back Watson deep in the Woking half which resulted in skipper Jacob Woods scoring to edge Woking further ahead.

**Half time: Woking RFC 19 - 3 Egham Hollowegians RFC**

Despite being forced into several changes at the break due to injury Woking started the second half in the same vein as the first finished with an excellent team try. From a centre scrum on half way replacement scrum half Rhys Parker broke right to combine with winger Marc McGiven who beat his man and making good ground popped back inside to the supporting Matt Ralph who was stopped but was able pop up the ball to blindside flanker Carlo Moriska in support to crash over on debut. It was then Keilhan Watson's turn to get his second using his pace to break down the touchline and score in the corner to give Woking a 29-3 lead.

At this point, Woking should have been comfortable, but tiredness and injuries almost saw Woking snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. The last twenty minutes saw Egham use their big pack to good effect and pressurise in the scrum. They managed to get 3 tries which brought the score back to 29-22. The last few minutes saw Woking defend doggedly before driving Egham back to the 22-metre line and a knock on bringing the game to an end with relief for Woking and despair for Egham.

Both captain Jacob Woods and first team coach Mark Rose agreed there was a lot of character shown especially in the final quarter with players being forced to play in unfamiliar positions. The latter commenting "I think today was a valuable lesson in how we need to play for the whole 80 minutes. That said when it really mattered, the boys stood up to be counted. I couldn't be prouder or asked for more."

Jacob Woods, added "We now have 4 weeks over the Christmas break to get injuries sorted and continue to prepare for what promises to be an exciting second half of the season."

Man of the Match: Jacob Woods.



# AGAINST ALL ODDS WOKING TAKE SHARE OF THE SPOILS

## Mitcham & Carshalton RFC 14 vs Woking RFC 14

Woking kicked off 2024 with an impressive back to the wall performance at Mitcham & Carshalton which saw them come away with 2 points and extend their run to one defeat in their last five fixtures in Surrey Counties 5.



With key members of the squad still ruled out through injury, including skipper Jacob Woods, and several more unavailable Woking took to the field with just 13 players following some late withdrawals from the squad.

The hosts started well sensing a chance to avenge their heavy defeat against the visitors earlier in the season. Woking got off to the worst possible start with Mitcham turning the ball over inside their 22m and using their numerical advantage to get the ball wide and score in the corner within the opening two minutes.

As Woking found their feet and adapted to the situation they grew in confidence and started to get on the front foot thanks to some direct running from prop Joe Griggs and number 8 John Dickie. This was backed up with some crunching tackles and turnovers from flankers Josh Claydon and the returning Phil Price.

On a heavy pitch, playing into the wind and up the slope the game became attritional as Woking looked to contain their hosts. Despite these best-efforts Mitcham did score another converted try. However, having taken the lead and with the extra men Mitcham could not replicate their earlier efforts and squandered multiple good opportunities as to a man the Woking defence held out.

As frustrations set in, Woking were able to move up the pitch thanks to some excellent touchline kicking by Mark Rose from the penalties being conceded by the hosts. From one of the resulting lineouts inside the Mitcham 22m, prop Joe Griggs collected a loose ball before showing a turn of speed to burst through a gap in the lineout for a clear run to the goal line. Mark Rose successfully added the extras to cut Mitcham's advantage to just 7 points at the break.

Despite having the lion's share of possession in the second half and the luxury of a long subs bench, Mitcham still could not gain the upper hand and were repeatedly denied by a defiant Woking team intent on giving their opponents nothing without working for hard for it.

Where they could Woking kept their opponents honest by offering an attacking threat when in possession of the ball. With 15 minutes remaining Woking capitalised on Mitcham's profligacy and scored a well taken breakaway try as wing Gareth Nearn was fed by centre Finlay Rowe to outspurt several defenders from 40m out to score. Mark Rose made it 2 from 2 to bring the scores level.

Despite their best efforts to finish the game off, Mitcham simply could not get the score to kill the game off and end Woking's spirited and determined resistance. The visitors with time running out could have snatched the victory but were either let down by indiscipline at the breakdown or poor execution with players out on their feet.

Having watched from the sidelines skipper Jacob Woods, commented "What a performance from all who pulled on the Woking shirt this afternoon. Nothing was left out there and to a man everyone contributed to a performance to be proud of individually and as team. It is not often you can come off the pitch following a draw where it feels like a win, but that is how it feels right now"

**Man of the Match:** John Dickie

# LEAGUE LEADERS ULTIMATELY PROVE TOO STRONG FOR WOKING

## Reigate RFC 27 vs Woking RFC 13

It was a case of what might have been after Woking slipped to defeat on the road at Surrey Counties 5 league leaders Reigate RFC. Having not played the previous week after their home match with Croydon RFC was postponed due to a frozen pitch Woking were able to name a squad of 19 for their latest encounter against an opponent that has yet to be beaten this season.



On a heavy pitch Reigate kicked off down the slope and with the wind behind them immediately got on the front foot going through several phases of play. However, Woking held firm with some excellent and disciplined defence, turning the ball over at the breakdown or forcing their hosts into errors. The game followed this pattern for much of the first quarter.

Then, against the run of play Woking took the lead. From a turnover in their own half fly half Mark Rose kicked deep into Reigate 22m which their opponents failed to deal with following an excellent chase by flanker Josh Claydon and the Woking back line. The resulting penalty was converted by Mark Rose to open the scoring.

Reigate hit back immediately and camped on the Woking line, but again were repelled. A brilliant piece of last-ditch defence from full back Keihlan Watson being a notable highlight with Reigate looking certain to score. Eventually the Reigate pressure paid off when they scored from close range.

Having got in front Reigate were again caught out by another high kick up the middle of the pitch. Centre Carl Jacobz collected the kick before being stopped on the Reigate 10m line. Good support play saw the Woking pack recycle several phases before the ball was spun wide down the line for Watson to score in the corner.

With the league leaders visibly rattled, Woking enjoyed their best period of possession and pressure but failed to turn it into points and the half finished with Woking 8 – 5 up. Kicking off down the slope Woking started the second half. Having regrouped at the break Reigate demonstrated why they were champions elect with a quick double try salvo to finally take control of the game. Both tries came from Woking errors whilst in attack and seemed to finally break the visitor's spirited resistance.

The game also became stop-start with both sides losing players to injury as the physicality of the match continued. With a stronger and deeper bench Reigate began to dominate as Woking tired and were forced into several positional changes. Inevitably this led to Reigate scoring a fourth converted try under the posts to stretch their lead to 22-8.

Once again with the odds stacked against them Woking showed the grit and determination not to give in and fought their way back down to the Reigate 22m. After some good Reigate defence and another injury stoppage Woking were awarded a scrum. From this platform in centre field the Woking back line showed their class as Finaly Rowe broke the gain line with perfectly timed run and pass from Rose to feed Jacobz who in turn fed Kiehlan Watson who grabbed his second of the afternoon and a dead leg in the process.

With only 13 fit players on the field Woking did concede late on allowing Reigate to extend their lead to 27 – 13 and deservedly take a hard-fought victory.

Post match Head Coach and Skipper for the day Mark Rose said, 'As individuals and ability there is not much between the sides, however Reigate were fitter and stronger which eventually told. They have been together several seasons and that shows on the pitch and as a squad. Following such a great first half performance we believed that the win was possible but all credit to Reigate who came back and showed why they are top of the league.'

**Man of the Match:** Josh Claydon



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**Man of the Match:** Josh Claydon

# A THUMPING WIN FOR WOKING

## Woking RFC 79 vs Croydon RFC 17

Saturday at the Byfleet rec was a grey day, with internationals keeping spectators and players away it was a quiet but determined start for both sides of 15 men without substitutes.

A similar start to the season's earlier fixture between Croydon and Woking ensued with both teams carrying the ball hard into contact in a tight attritional game.

After 10 minutes of grind in the middle of the pitch the Woking nine (Matt Ralph) fired a long pass to find Mark Rose at flyhalf and with one more long relay into the hands of Keihlan Watson, Croydon's vulnerability was revealed; without anyone with the pace to match the Woking's Fullback a quick try was scored and converted (7-0).

A quick repeat from the restart resulted in Woking 12-0.

Croydon now realised they had to keep the ball in hand and they ground Woking down to their try line with short runs and keeping the ball close. After sustained pressure Woking leaked from a 5 metre scrum (12-7).

With injuries on both sides, each team was down to 14 men, which, although keeping the numbers even, increased the space for Woking's backline flyers. Another three tries before half-time set an impossible task for Croydon.

**Half-time:** Woking 29 - 7 Croydon

The second half started with another Croydon player leaving the field to make it 14 v 13 and with Woking's Carl Jacobz at 13 and winger Charlie Goddard determined not to let Keihlan score all the tries the scene was set for a display of ruthless try scoring around the edges. The Croydon 13 remained determined and spirited but couldn't help flagging in trying to defend the wings and the Woking pack, who were now recycling well in the middle with Josh Claydon especially proving a handful. Although struggling to defend, Croydon put their effort into attacking and in the last 10 minutes clawed a couple of tries back.

Sadly it wasn't enough to prevent a thumping final score for Woking at full time: 79 - 17.

**Man of the Match:** Keihlan Watson with six tries!

# LATE DISAPPOINTMENT FOR WOKING, BUT SEASON A MASSIVE STEP IN RIGHT DIRECTION

## WOKING RFC 15 vs LONDON FRENCH RFC 19

Woking's 2023/24 Surrey Counties 5 season ended in the same dramatic way as it started at Raynes Park back in September losing out in the final play of a fiercely contested match.



The hosts welcomed promotion chasing London French who needed a point to secure promotion to secure an immediate return to Surrey Counties 4 following Woking's impressive victory over Raynes Park the previous Saturday.

Woking themselves were able to welcome back several more players from injury allowing Head Coach Mark Rose to take a watching brief as he named a squad of 23.

With a strong wind behind them London French kicked off deep into the Woking half. An uncharacteristic knock on from Carl Jacobz receiving the kick resulted in a French scrum 10 meters from the Woking line. Immediately, Woking were under pressure, and this continued throughout the opening exchanges with the visitors determined to stamp their authority on the match.

Defensively, Woking were working hard with several notable big hits from Jacobz and Charlie Godard stopping the French attacks which resulted in their opponents requiring



lengthy treatment. Eventually, London French's pressure told when they were awarded a penalty in front of the posts which was surprisingly missed.

A few minutes later more French pressure lead to Woking conceding multiple penalties as they struggled in the scrums. The promotion chasers pack camped on the Woking line and eventually crossed over from close range under the posts.

From the restart Woking were able to get a foothold in the game, enjoying time in their opponents 22m. French also had a kickable penalty to extend their lead, but this was missed. Then late in the first half Woking scored their opening try. Good play by the Woking pack, recycling the ball well through multiple phases of play, created the opportunity for scrum half Matt Ralph to feed centre Carl Jacobz who just about squeezed over the line to ground the ball despite the best efforts of 3 French defenders. The conversion out wide was missed.

### **Half time: Woking RFC 5 - 7 London French**

Disappointed with the inconsistency of their performance in the first half Woking wanted to take the game to the French. However, once again the visitors started the half strongly and took control of the early exchanges and were able to extend their lead with a try out wide.

At this point Woking could have crumbled but instead went on to dominate the next 20 minutes. Half backs Matt Ralph and Mike Aitcheson were becoming more influential in getting back rows Josh Claydon and John Dickie taking the ball at pace, second row Kieran Williamson was also showing well in the loose and centre Finlay Rowe and full back Keihlan Watson were starting to find gaps in the London French defence.

Woking were awarded a penalty which Car Jacobz converted to reduce the deficit to 4 points. Able to rotate the squad, a luxury that hasn't been there all season, Woking continued to take the game to French. More good play from the Woking forwards and backs sucked the defence in to create the opportunity for the returning KJ Nissen to go over. Jacobz converted and Woking now lead for the first time in the match with less than 10 minutes remaining.

Calling for cool heads Woking gathered the restart and recycled well and cleared their lines as Matt Ralph kicked deep towards the London French goal line. As French countered the Woking defence gave away a penalty which allowed the desperate French to gain territory and attacking position. With both sides scrapping to gain the upper hand, the French was awarded a scrum. Knowing it was the final play the ball arrived at the London French inside centre who in a moment of individual skill managed to step the on rushing Woking defence to break the line and score under the posts. As the conversion went over the final whistle went much to the delight of London French and disappointment of Woking.

### **Full time: Woking RFC 15 - 19 London French**

Post match, Captain Jacob Woods who has had to have a watching brief over the second half of the season due to a knee injury said, "Being able to push a good side like London

French until the end shows our progression over the course of this season. We matched them in every department but couldn't quite close the game out. I am proud of the boys and the work and commitment they have shown this season. Having struggled towards the foot of the table in recent seasons, a 4<sup>th</sup> place finish is a great achievement and probably exceeded expectations."

Chairman Andy Jones adds, "Mark (Rose) and Jacob (Woods) have led the boys brilliantly this season and it hasn't always been straightforward. That said, I am sure the lads will be looking to improve on this next season, and I am extremely optimistic about the future of the club and encourage anyone looking for a club next season to get involved as a player, supporter, or sponsor.

**MotM:** Finlay Rowe