

## MRFC (Extra 1st XV) 27 - Gravesend (III) 10 - 24th October 2015

After a slow start to the season Medway are starting to build a strong team spirit and work ethic which allows both their experienced and youthful talents to make a more telling contribution. That is not to say that everything is going their way, with late cry offs and first team calls seeing veteran coach - Essenhigh having to remove the moths from his kit bag and trot out as hooker. Plus there were several disruptions during the game caused by injuries, which never help. Then you look at the opposition, which was a very large, physical and strong running Gravesend side who, judging by their pre match warm up and drills, were clearly on a mission. So all of this makes this victory all the more credible and especially as by the end it was a conclusive one for Medway.

From the start it was clear that the Medway front row of Petch, Essenhigh and Waterman was going to inflict some pain on the Gravesend front row and completely dominate the scrums and so Gravesend's plans were on the back foot and whilst they clearly had well drilled plans to use their big pack to dominate in the loose, what ball they got was of poor quality. Allied to this the Medway side were showing real determination in the contact and Gravesend were having real difficulty in getting over the gain line. With Medway playing into the wind the first 20 minutes was a real arm wrestle with no side getting any control. Ironically from a rare foray into the opposition 22 a Medway move went wrong and Gravesend showed what a threat they were as they moved the ball down field through their strong 13 and it was only really good defence from Brightman and Simpson that saw an opponent held up over the line. However the resultant play saw Gravesend score a good team try that was converted. 0-7. The arm wrestle continued and from some controlled play from the forwards, who by now had forced the Gravesend tight head from the field, they were awarded a penalty which fly half Orris calmly struck over. 3-7. The arm wrestle continued and Gravesend converted a penalty well from 35 yards for a 3-10 lead. It was during this passage of play that Essenhigh's gout played up and he had to be replaced by Zimbabwean Jet Masere who made a real fist of playing out of position at hooker. On the stroke of half time as Medway attacked a frankly stupid penalty was given away and from the quick tap skipper Waterman was injured and had to retire from the game. This meant that the scrums now went uncontested and Medway had lost their line out thrower. So scrum dominance was lost and it did not look good for the second half.

As the second half started the team was beginning to settle and with fly half Orris beginning to show a real understanding of how his role fits into the team play and centres Ellis and Fussell enforcing a strong physical presence in mid field Medway began to pin back Gravesend and make them work extra hard for the ball and move their large forwards around the pitch. After 15 minutes the more

instinctive Medway play told and veteran wing Catlin, in broken play from a turnover, set off on a mazy run and put supporting flanker - Joe Fernyhough - away for a fine try which was converted. 10-10. Gravesend came back strongly and when their large, athletic 2nd row drove in he and his colleagues were surprised to see him launched backwards by Fussell who was harshly sin binned for a dominant tackle. The disruption did not put Medway off and they continued to make Gravesend work and a penalty was won which Orris converted. 13-10. As confidence grew Medway played more expansive rugby and with Burns at full back showing real character under the high ball and returning the ball with interest Gravesend were finding it hard to break the Medway defence. From a turn over 40 yards out the ball was effectively moved to Chalmers on the wing and he broke clear and put Fernyhough in for a fine try. 20-10. The pattern continued and as the play became more and more broken Orris saw his chance and danced through the tiring Gravesend defence and only a desperate tackle saw his effort thwarted but his supporting players won the ball and prop Petch crashed over for a well-deserved try. 27-10.

This was a hard fought win against a well prepared and physical side but for the first time this season there was a cohesive team structure and a more intelligent approach to managing the game which allowed the players to play to their potential. A clearly old and injured coach Essenhigh was justly proud of his player's efforts - as should they be.

E.I. Addio - your man on the touchline just glad he did not have to get his kit out of the museum

**Squad:** Richard Petch, Paul Essenhigh, Al Waterman, Luke Osborne, Dan Goodall, Joe Fernyhough, Toby Gerdes-Hansen, Doug Ebanks, George Simpson, Alfie Orris, Matt Brightman, Owain Fussell, Bobby Ellis, Conor Chalmers, Sam Catlin, Sam Pearson, Rhys Burns, Jet Masere