

Medway (Extra First XV) 31 Tunbridge Wells (II) 10

5th December 2015

Bearing in mind that this game was played with a very strong, gusting wind blowing straight down the pitch both teams deserve real credit for putting on such a good display of rugby.

Indeed the longer the game went on the more the spectators forgot the wind - although the diehards on the clubhouse terrace might disagree ! Finding themselves facing into the wind from the kick off Medway knew what they had to do - be determined in defence and then be patient and sensible with the ball when in possession. Having taken a look at their opponents this was not going to be an easy task, as they fielded a much heavier pack and their backs had 2 very strong, heavy running centres. So Medway took real encouragement from the first scrum when they established what was to be total dominance of the scrums which meant the Wells side could not count on even winning their own ball. So the pattern was set with Medway, when in possession, playing their way out of their own 22 and in defence taking the space away from their opponents and tackling low and hard. This meant that Wells could not get any structure to their play. After 10 minutes Medway lost Gerdes- Hansen to a severe abdominal strain and Joe Fernyhough joined the fray and it was not long before he began, along with Sandison, to prove himself a real nuisance with Medway beginning to play more expansively, using short passing and support play which threatened the Wells territorial dominance. So much so that Wells, when awarded a penalty gratefully took the kick for a 0-3 lead. The contest carried on in similar fashion for another 10 minutes until some Medway indiscretions saw them lose their poise and shape and Wells took full advantage for a good team try that was converted. 0-10. During the game there were some significant individual plays and it was a few minutes later when the Wells made another good attack and they looked certain to score that young full back - Rhys Burns - tackled a much larger opponent and dislodged the ball in the tackle. From this Medway calmly worked the ball out of their 22 and with scrum half Rumsey, who played an intelligent game and kept making the play around the base of the pack, darting up the blind side he fed Fernyhough who broke the line and showing excellent calmness and judgement timed his pass perfectly to the supporting Burns who raced 50 yards for the try, although the swallow dive for the touchline nearly saw the wind blow him back into play. Orris converted HT - 7- 10.

With coach Essenhigh's words of "more of the same" ringing in their ears the first 10 minutes of the 2nd half saw them struggle to relax and another turning point was when the Wells side won a penalty 15 yards from the Medway line and in front of the posts. Unfortunately for them the resultant kick veered wide in the wind. So still 7-10. Medway then began to get in the groove and with their scrum now rampant and man of the match - Lyam Johnson - not only driving the scrums but now charging to real effect with the ball (2 powerful hand offs in quick succession in one run were a real highlight) it became a question of whether Medway could play smart, controlled and patient rugby. With the wind on his back fly half, Alfie Orrie, began to run more freely and young centre Sam Sharpe was proving a real threat against his much larger opponents. With some genuinely attractive play the ball moved from right to left and was recycled back to the right and Burns scored his 2nd try. Then rugged forward team work saw Brian Moore look a like - Sam Brice - burrow his way over for a try. 19-10. Not satisfied with this Essenhigh urged his team forward and everyone in the side celebrated when wing - Matt Brightman - decided that a clean gap down to the corner flag was too easy and stopped, ran into the 2 larger opponents and then with fierce determination, leg drive and some help from his team drove over the line from 6 yards out for a well-deserved try. 24-10.

Finally from more pressure scrum half Rumsey made yet another dart for the line which deserved a try but resulted in Ellis scoring and the final result was 31-10 As ever the team were led by example by skipper Waterman who does the basics really well, along with giving his opposing props a torrid afternoon. What continues to give coach Essenhigh particular pleasure is the continuing development of his young and inexperienced players, such as Luke Osborne and Dan Goodall who are now beginning to look comfortable at this level. This with the strength of character they are showing,

typified by wing Ben Edgar who battled on with a bloody nose means that some astute observers at Medway wonder how long it will be before Ess gets the call from Mr. Abramovich?

E.I. Addio - your man who ,thanks to the wind, ran touch faster than he has for many years.

Squad: Al Waterman, Sam Brice, Lyam Johnson, Dan Goodall, Luke Osborne, Toby Gerdes- Hansen, Tom Sandison, Eanna Flanagan, John Rumsey, Alfie Orris, Matt Brightman, Sam Sharpe, Bobby Ellis, Ben Edgar, Rhys Burns, Joe fernyough

Tries: Burns (2), Brice, Brightman, Ellis