

Medway Extra 27 Tunbridge Wells (II) 5 - 7th January 2017

The first game of 2017 saw the Extras welcome Tunbridge Wells to a damp Priestfield keen to continue with their winning run which included a 0 - 52 win in the reverse fixture earlier in the season. It was clear from the start, however, that this was a much stronger Wells outfit and that Medway were not going to have such an easy time of it.

In all honesty the first half was a dreary affair with Medway dominating territory and possession without ever playing with the cohesion and decisiveness that they had shown before the Christmas break. With too many knock-ons and some poor decision making from the forwards who seemed intent on running into their opposite numbers instead of looking for quick ball for the backs, Wells found it relatively easy to defend their line. The frustration within the coaching team was evident as Essenhigh shouted to his pack 'Do what you do well - don't think !' His inspirational outburst made little difference however as Medway continued to huff and puff without success. After twenty minutes Wells hadn't actually been in Medway's half of the pitch seeming content to soak up the pressure and kick to clear. However Medway finally got the scoreboard moving when scrum-half Sam Garofalo took the ball from a line-out and scrambled underneath the falling forwards before finding his feet to dive over for a 5 - 0 lead. Wells restarted and finally spent some time in the Medway half before a number of penalties saw Medway back on the attack. Another line-out saw Garofalo getting the backs moving as the ball went through the hands to centre Connor Chalmers who beat a defender and then drew another before releasing full back Rhys Burns who ran in for the second try. A successful Ellis conversion closed a stop-start first half with Medway 12 - 0 to the good.

The second half started with Wells looking more determined and dangerous as their big forwards began to make some inroads helped by some Medway indiscipline at crucial times that allowed them to maintain the momentum. Medway defended well, however, and finally got into the Wells twenty-two where a penalty saw Ellis increase the lead to 15 - 0. Wells came straight back but when centre Sam Sharpe made a good break from his twenty-two straight up the middle of the pitch they were suddenly under pressure again. With the forwards in support and some great lines being run by flanker Bear Stapleton and second row Ben Shove at the rucks Medway made ground up to the five metre line where quick ball saw Sharpe send a long pass out to the right where winger Matt Brightman took it and finished well in the corner for a 20 - 0 lead. Medway increased their lead soon after the restart when Chalmers reacted quickly picking up a loose ball on Medway's ten metre line and setting off at lightning pace up the right wing beating three defenders before touching down under the posts for an excellent individual try and a 27 - 0 lead. Wells came straight back and the final ten minutes saw Medway defending resolutely, conceding penalties and losing a man to a yellow card before Wells finally got the try that their determination deserved to make the final score 27 - 5.

This was a tough game for the Extras and Tunbridge Wells are to be congratulated for making it extremely difficult. They played some very sensible rugby with determination and commitment that will do them well for the rest of the season and we wish them well. A very big thank you to referee Mr Willis who, even though the game was played in a good spirit, took control when he needed to and allowed a game to finally develop. Well done Sir.

Squad: Andy Connell, Mark Coveney, Al Waterman, Dan Goodall, Ben Shove, Paul Ward, Bear Stapleton, Tom Brown, Sam Garofalo, Bobby Ellis, Ben Wellard, Sam Sharpe, Connor Chalmers, Matt Brightman, Rhys Burns, Ben Edgar, Toby Gerdes-Hansen, Dan O'Brien