

Dartfordians (II) 21 Medway Extra 34 (Invicta 1) 07th April 2018

The Extra's made the short trip up the A2 with a very different looking side from previous weeks as they looked to blood a number of Development Squad players with an eye on next season.

Medway started well spending the opening period in the Dartfordians half thanks to some good control from half backs Rob O'Brien and Brad Ford which allowed centres Bobby Ellis and Lewis Hollidge to exploit gaps in the Darts defence. Medway got to the five metre line but lost the ball forward giving Darts the chance to clear their lines but the kick didn't find touch and was taken well by winger Matt Brightman who ran it back strongly making twenty yards before finally being brought to ground. Quick ball from the ruck found flanker Lewis Marriott who had timed his run well and he burst through the line to score under the posts. A successful Ford conversion saw Medway take an early 0 - 7 lead but as has so often been the case this season they immediately let their opponents back into the game when they failed to deal with the restart. Using the advantage Darts picked up the loose ball and made their way into the Medway twenty-two before releasing their winger who skipped through three poor tackles before touching down and levelling the scores. Medway regrouped and a succession of kickable penalties saw Ford take the opportunities to extend the Medway lead to 7 - 13. Darts came back and looked certain to score as their backs flooded forward creating a three on two but a poor pass was intercepted by Ellis on the five metre line and he broke at pace reaching the Darts ten metre line before offloading to Hollidge who got deep into the twenty-two before being tackled. A penalty for hands in the ruck saw Medway take the scrum with Gerdes-Hansen picking up at the rear and getting to the five metre line to set up a ruck from which prop Andy Connell picked up and dived over for a 7 - 20 lead. There then followed a delay as winger Rhys Burns suffered a leg injury which has ended his season prematurely - we all wish him a speedy recovery. Despite this setback Medway finished the half on top as second row debutant Rhys Gue took a high ball and crashed through three tackles making twenty metres before offloading to O'Brien who quickly found full back Zach Garratt. He showed great pace as he tore through the Darts line before finding flaker Dave French in support who ran in for a 7 - 27 score at half time.

The second half took twenty minutes to get going as both sides made a number of silly handling errors and neither played with any structure. Added to that were a number of delays for injuries (thankfully no more serious ones) which led to a disjointed and frustrating period of play. Darts were the first to score however as Medway kicked deep to clear their lines and then failed to defend the resulting attack with a poor defensive line and too many missed tackles which saw the Darts winger run in another try to close the gap to 14 - 27. Medway came back with a score of their own as good work at a breakdown saw Ellis turn the ball over and send it out wide to the backs. Garratt came into the line at full pace and took the final pass on the Darts ten metre line beating two defenders to run in under the posts for a 14 - 34 lead. Darts weren't done however and when Medway were caught offside at a ruck they kicked for touch to set up the line out. Quick ball to their big centre saw him crash through to score and narrow the gap but it wasn't enough as, despite a huge effort from Darts in the last few minutes, Medway defended well and stood firm to see the game out and come away with a 21 - 34 win. This was a frustrating afternoon for Medway who didn't play to their structures and systems for the majority of the game and it was individual skill levels that got them through - still a win is a win. What was very encouraging was that the Dev Squad debutants, Ted Shand, Adam Dady and man of the match Rhys Gue all performed well and have put down a very real marker for further selection. Our thanks go to Dartfordians who played with real spirit and never gave up - we wish them well for the last few games of the season. Thanks also to referee Mr Hollins who was consistent throughout and without whom we wouldn't have got a game.

Medway Squad: Richard Petch, Andy Connell, Al Waterman, Ben Shove, Rhys Gue, Lewis Marriott, Dave French, Toby Gerdes-Hansen, Rob O'Brien, Brad Ford, Rhys Burns, Bobby Ellis, Lewis Hollidge, Matt Brightman, Zach Garratt, Adam Dady, Ted Shand