

Medway Extra 22 Sidcup (II) 27 (Invicta 1) 27th January 2018

On a thoroughly miserable afternoon the Extras welcomed unbeaten Sidcup to Priestfields in what transpired to be a real game of two halves.

Medway played the first half with the strong wind behind them looking to make the most of the conditions early on and they started well spending the first five minutes camped in the Sidcup half. The pressure that was building was rewarded with an early penalty which fly half Brad Ford put uncharacteristically wide but when Medway reclaimed the restart they continued where they had left off building the pressure and keeping Sidcup pinned in their twenty-two. After a succession of pick and go's Sidcup were caught offside allowing Medway to kick to touch for the line out. In the wet and windy conditions hooker, and Medway's Man of the Match Tom Whitnell, got the ball in straight but Sidcup knocked it on whilst challenging giving Medway a scrum on the five metre line. The forwards, already showing that they were more than a match for the big and heavy Sidcup pack, proceeded to push them back at a rate of knots causing their front row to come up and referee, Mr Hayward, to award a penalty try. Sidcup restarted 7 - 0 down but were on the scoreboard soon after as Medway failed to deal with the kick gifting Sidcup easy possession. They worked the ball quickly through the phases with forwards and backs combining well, being assisted by some missed tackles, before finally releasing their winger to score and narrow the gap to 7 - 5. Medway regrouped and when a Sidcup knock on gave them scrum possession the forwards again took control giving the backs quick ball. A good break from centre Doug Ebanks beat two defenders before finding full back Rhys Burns in support who took the pass and finished off for a 12 - 5 lead. Sidcup knocked on from the restart and with Mr Hayward playing advantage Medway ran the ball out from their twenty two with winger Bobby Ellis making ground before finally being brought down on Sidcup's ten metre line. Medway were quick in support and quick ball again saw them make ground before Sidcup, looking to slow things down, did so illegally giving Ford the chance to take the three points and extend the lead to 15 - 5. Sidcup reduced this to 15 - 8 a few minutes later when Medway were caught offside. Medway came back making their way into Sidcup territory with a succession of penalties one of which saw centre Luke Burns taking the chance to go quickly bursting through a series of tackles to score an excellent try. Extra's debutant Lewis Hollidge, on at fly half for the now injured Ford, stepped up and calmly slotted the conversion giving Medway a half time lead off 22 - 8.

The second half started with both teams struggling to cope with the conditions but the Sidcup forwards finally began to exert some pressure and when Medway failed to deal with a deep, wind assisted clearing kick from the Sidcup full back they had a line out ten metres from the Medway line. A simple catch and drive which Medway couldn't stop saw Sidcup score and reduce Medway's lead to 22 - 15. Medway came back on the attack looking to keep things tight in the forwards but Sidcup defended well and were gifted possession on a number of occasions with knock ons and penalties. As Medway looked to be a bit more expansive a long pass intended for the left wing was intercepted by the Sidcup centre giving him the easy task of running in under the posts for a converted try and a score of 22 - 15. Sidcup now stepped things up but Medway defended well and had their opportunities to build pressure getting themselves within ten metres of the Sidcup line on a number of occasions but they were unable to make the most of the possession. The final score came as Medway's scrum half Rob O'Brien had the ball knocked out of his hand at a scrum by his opposite number who then hacked it on twice. The wind took the ball from ten metres from the Sidcup line over the try line at the other end where the Sidcup winger, who had outpaced the Medway players who had had to turn to chase it, fell on it to give Sidcup the lead and, ultimately, the win 22 - 27.

This was a hard-fought game in awful conditions and both teams are to be congratulated for sticking at it. Medway will feel very disappointed to have lost this one particularly as they failed to score in the second half but Sidcup aren't unbeaten and at the top of the league for nothing. We look forward to the return game which will hopefully be in better conditions. A very big thank you to referee Mr Hayward who had an excellent game setting the standard early whilst trying to let the teams play.

Squad: Richard Petch, Tom Whitnell, Andy Connell, Dan Goodall, Ben Shove, Johnny Smith, Tad Bileisis, Dave French, Toby Gerdes-Hansen, Rob O'Brien, Brad Ford, Bobby Ellis, Doug Ebanks, Luke Burns, Matt Brightman, Rhys Burns, Johnny Smith, Paul Ward, Lewis Hollidge