

Medway Extra 25 Dartfordians II 5 (Invicta 1) 09th December 2017

The Extra's welcomed Dartfordians to a bright and cold Prestfields after yet another week off that they could have done without. These constant breaks in their fixtures have done nothing to help with their consistency and fluency and this was evident as they took a while to get going against a good Darts side.

Darts kicked off and Medway began to make their way into the opposition half until a knock on brought the first, and it transpired, only contested scrum of the game. Medway's forwards continued with their season's scrum dominance driving Darts back with some ease and winning the ball against the head but when another knock on resulted in another scrum, Darts found themselves down a prop due to injury and the now regular spectacle of uncontested scrums began. Robbed of a good attacking and defensive platform Medway had to be sure of their structures. They made their way slowly into the attacking third thanks to a string of Darts penalties from which the line outs worked well and took the lead after fifteen minutes when Ben Shove picked up from the base of a ruck and drove over the line for a 5 - 0 lead. Medway failed to secure the restart and Darts showed that they were going to be a threat all game from uncontested scrums as their No.8, who ended the game as their Man of the Match, picked up from the base and made good ground before releasing the backs to run in and draw level. Medway came straight back and went through some good phases with the backs and forwards combining well to get right on to the try line before a penalty should have released the pressure for Darts. They kicked to touch but Medway won the line out with Dave French out jumping them yet again to secure the ball. The forwards began their relentless drive for the line which Darts were unable to stop allowing Mark Coveney to drop on the ball for a half time lead of 10 - 5.

The second half started with both sides making too many handling errors resulting in yet more frustrating uncontested scrums with the stop / start nature of the game probably favouring Darts more than Medway. However it was Medway who struck fifteen minutes in as French picked up from a scrum and made good ground before offloading to scrum half Rob O'Brien. He threw an inch perfect pass to winger Matt Brightman who took it a full pace and tore off up the right beating two defenders before touching down for a 15 - 5 lead. Medway were now getting into a rhythm that saw them begin to break a resolute Darts defence with fly half Bobby Ellis making a number of good breaks to get the backs moving. The forwards were still working hard and a number of turn overs allowed them to put some width on the ball which saw replacement winger Micky Hutton set off down the left before being tackled ten yards short of the line. Centre Mitch Dent, who had been in close support, picked up and tore over the line despite the best efforts of the Darts full back to stop him. Darts restarted 20 - 5 down and enjoyed an extended period of possession and pressure assisted by some ill discipline from Medway. They thought that they were about to score following a catch and drive from a line out but they lost the ball forward and Medway seized the opportunity to attack from deep with the backs breaking the defensive line to get into the Darts twenty two. Darts finally recovered and slowed things down before O'Brien set the backs off again with Brightman, Medway's Man of the Match, again taking the final pass and showing strength to keep going with the Darts full back hanging on to him to touch down for his second and a final score of 25 - 5.

This was a disjointed game made even more frustrating by the lack of scrummaging. This was the fifth game out of six where the opposition have gone to uncontested scrums within the first half but never as early as the third minute. At 2nd XV level this is really becoming an issue. Still there was enough about Medway that saw them run out deserved winners but credit must go to Darts who are a talented side and worked really hard. Thanks also to ref Mr Alexander without whom there wouldn't have been a game

Squad: Tom Whitnell, Mark Coveney, Lyam Johnson, Dan Goodall, Ben Shove, Oscar Wells, Dan O'Brien, Dave French, Rob O'Brien, Bobby Ellis, Ben Wellard, Rhys Townsend, Mitch Dent, Matt Brightman, Rhys Burns, Johnny Smith, Al Waterman, Tad Bileisis, Micky Hutton