

Medway Extra 29 Old Alleynians (II) 10 (Invicta 1) 17th February 2018

At last ! No rain, no wind and temperatures above freezing as the Extra's welcomed Old Alleynians to a bright and sunny Priestfields for this important Invicta 1 game. The reverse fixture earlier in the season had seen OA's run out 22 - 21 winners and so this was never going to be an easy game.

Medway started brightly gaining an early foothold deep in Old Alleynians territory as they retained the ball well and, playing with plenty of tempo, looked to capitalise on their possession. The OA's defence coped well with the early pressure but Medway kept probing looking for a way through. The first few scrums of the game had seen parity between the two packs, an unusual phenomenon for the Medway forwards who have been used to dominating in this area all season, but it was from a scrum that the first try eventually came as quick ball found centre Luke Burns who shrugged off two tackles to score. Having got the score that they deserved, Medway were then guilty of handing points straight back as a penalty straight from the restart saw OA's take the three points to close the gap to 5 - 3. Medway restarted and again kept OA's pinned back in their half making them kick to clear their lines which gave Medway's back three opportunities to run straight back at them. On one such attack full back Lewis Hollidge found centre Doug Ebanks in support who set off up the left wing before being stopped by a high tackle giving Medway the penalty which was kicked to touch. Medway knocked on at the line out but the forwards made up for this with a superb scrum which pushed OA's off their ball and when it was sent out wide left winger Rhys Burns took the pass and ran in behind the posts for a converted try and a 12 - 3 lead. OA's came straight back and for the next ten minutes played in the Medway half building pressure through some good handling and line breaks from their centres. Medway defended well but when they knocked on having initially turned the ball over at a ruck OA's had a scrum in front of the posts ten metres out. This time their forwards held their ground before releasing their centre who broke the defensive line to score and narrow the lead to 12 - 10. The rest of the half saw Medway applying pressure but lacking the composure and the patience to make the most of their territorial dominance and the half ended with no further scores and Medway leading 12 - 10.

Having been told to calm down, tighten up and play to their structures during the half time break, Medway came out for the second half and actually did as they had been told spending the first ten minutes camped in the OA's half. An uncharacteristic penalty miss saw OA's restart with a twenty-two that was taken by prop Andy Connell who ran straight back into the heart of the OA's defence before finally being brought to ground. Quick ball brought the backs into it and yet more ground was made before the forwards again took over with a number of close pick and go's that saw them edge ever nearer to the OA's line. The defence initially held but the pressure finally told as scrum half Rob O'Brien picked up from the back of yet another ruck and dived over for the converted try and a 19 - 10 lead. OA's restarted but immediately found themselves back in their half as second row Tad Bileisis took the kick before setting off on a strong run which saw him go from the Medway twenty-two back to the OAs ten metre line before off loading to Connell who took it on another ten metres before the ball was lost forward at the ruck. The resulting scrum saw the OA's front row being penalised and fly half Brad Ford slotted the kick for a 22 - 10 lead. With 20 minutes left Medway just needed to stay composed to see out the game but OA's refused to give up and Medway were forced to defend again before finally sealing the win as the forwards stole another line out and quick ball along the backs found Ebanks, now out on the left wing, showing real pace to beat the OA's defence and score for another converted try and a final score of 29 - 10.

Medway will be pleased with this important win over near rivals in the league with their second half display preventing OA's from scoring and securing a losing bonus point. Hopefully they will have learned that playing with more composure and staying with our structures brings better rugby and they need to take this forward over the rest of the season. Our thanks to OA's who as always fought hard and played their part in a combative but good spirited game. We wish them well for the remainder of the season. Our thanks also to referee Mr McGhee who had a good game and allowed the teams to play and enjoy the afternoon.

Medway Squad: Richard Petch, Andy Connell, Al Waterman, Tad Bileisis, Dan Goodall, Oscar Wells, Dave French, Toby Gerdes-Hansen, Rob O'Brien, Brad Ford, Rhys Burns, Doug Ebanks, Luke Burns, Matt Brightman, Lewis Hollidge, Tom Sandison, Richard Desmond, Ben Wellard, Mitch Dent