

Maidstone (II) 12 Medway Extra 16 - 23rd January 2016

On a sticky Mote Park pitch both sides played with lots of commitment and endeavour - particularly Maidstone. What was lacking, especially from Medway, was any real tactical appreciation, composure or quality. Indeed the best aspect of the afternoon's play was the weather which was very pleasantly mild. Maidstone's spectators were overheard to say that Medway are a good benchmark of their own team's performance. So with a hard fought win in sight and only a few minutes on the clock and with Medway looking as though they could not win even if the opposition walked off - they must be scratching their heads wondering how they lost. If it is any consolation Medway coach Essenhigh was wondering how Medway managed to win after a very poor effort.

The set piece offered contrasting fortunes. The Maidstone line out worked beautifully all afternoon - considerably helped by Medway watching it. On the other hand the Medway pack was completely dominant in the scrum and it was only Maidstone's latest overseas recruit from South Africa playing himself in at number 8 who prevented this aspect of the game becoming Medway's platform for a comfortable win. He was excellent in cleaning up retreating ball and using his dynamism and size to get over the gain line. Indeed how he did not score a try in the first half is a mystery - perhaps it was the English mud that weighed him down?

So having been told to play territory Medway did exactly that. They played in their own 22 for most of the half and compounded their errors with ill judged "exit strategies" and not using their gifted kickers. That resulted in them giving penalties away (9 to 2 against in the first half) and turning over the ball far too many times. Then against the run of play they managed to reach the Maidstone half and forced a penalty. Young fly half Alfie Orris, who had a mixed afternoon, kicked a good conversion. 0-3. Any hopes that this would improve the play were quickly forgotten and Medway defended desperately, somehow preventing the Maidstone 8 from touching down twice - well done Toby Gerdes- Hansen and Ben Dance. However from another turnover 15 yards from their own line the ball "popped up" to the Maidstone lock who, much to his surprise, found himself in a gap for a quick gallop to the posts for the try, which was converted. 7-3. Just before half time Medway forced their way up field with something resembling rugby and won a penalty. Again Orris converted from 30 yards out. 7-6. Half time and a time for reflection.

With coach Essenhigh's words of get it in their 22, no penalties and some good simple rugby Medway kicked off the second half. Three penalties and a turnover later they were defending their line grimly.

It was inevitable that they would concede a score and so it was as Maidstone scored in the corner. 12-6. Medway then began to play with a little more structure and when they won a penalty opted for a scrum in the opposition 22. They then calmly drove this to a yard from the line when 2 defenders appeared from the side and prevented the score. The failure to be awarded a penalty try clearly rattled the Medway team and the game went back to the same frustrating series of knock ons, turnovers and offsidies.

Medway were then forced to replace skipper Al Waterman with the coach (please adjust your TV sets for colour brilliance). Ess will take some time to live down his midfield pirouette and miss pass that went 2 yards down into the mud. So nothing had really changed with his introduction. With the clock running down Medway used the boot to get the play upfield and spent a few minutes in the Maidstone 22. From a scrum Medway's mongrel - scrum half Rumsey - forced an error and did well to scoop up the loose ball from out of the mud and then slid over for a try, which Orris converted well. 12 - 13. Then to add insult to injury and with very little time on the clock Medway earned a penalty close to the half line and Orris elected to take the kick and struck a very good penalty from 47 yards to secure the win.

E.I.Addio - your man on the touchline chatting with the mums and dads - lovely weather for the time of year isn't it? What do you mean there is a rugby game on?

Squad: Meto Meta'afa, Ross Cooley, Al Waterman, Luke Osborne, Dan Goodall, Tom Sandison, Ben Dance, Toby Gerdes-Hansen, John Rumsey, Alfie Orris, Sam Pearson, Mitch Dent, Connor Chalmers, Matt Brightman, Rhys Burns, Evan Morgan, Paul Essenhigh