

## Medway (Extra 1st) 26 Sidcup (II) 24 - 19th March 2016

As the scoreline suggests this was a close fought encounter and so it was; with the last 3 minutes seeing Medway desperately defending their line as Sidcup launched attack after attack. With Medway fielding a decidedly young team (with the odd, very odd exception) and facing clearly more experienced and physically bigger opponents it was always going to be a case of the team that could impose themselves and their preferred style of play that won. Neither team quite managed that.

With tactics discussed and agreed Medway had the worse start they could imagine. From the kick off lock Luke Osborne collected and secured the ball beautifully. So imagine his puzzlement when 10 seconds later Sidcup were scoring, having charged down the clearance kick. 0-5. There then followed 10 minutes of scrappy play as Sidcup piled on the pressure and challenged the Medway defence. However a mixture of poor execution and fully committed Medway defence - led by Tom Sandison, thwarted them and Medway began to find their feet. A half break by George Simpson nearly saw Medway get away and then there followed a 10 minute purple patch, during which Medway played some of their best rugby this season. Medway's aggressive defence saw them win quick ball which they confidently moved towards the left wing and 3 tries followed. Rhys Burns, Connor Chalmers (who was running with real conviction) and Jordan Stubbington finished off flowing moves which featured quick hands, strong running and excellent interpassing. 19-5. At this stage Sidcup did not know what had hit them but their older heads saw their opportunity as Medway began to take the wrong decisions and invited Sidcup into their half. Several line outs and scrums close to the Medway line saw them dominate the territorial battle for the last 5 minutes of the half and despite some superb defensive play were able to launch their very large prop towards the line some 3 yards out and there was only going to be one outcome. HT: 19-10.

A disappointed coach Essenhigh - who was having a quiet game at loose head - repeated the game plan i.e. don't go into contact and get the ball into their 22 at every opportunity. Just to prove how influential his talk was the Medway side decided to do the exact opposite and so spent most of the 2nd half, despite having the strong wind on their backs, in their own half without the ball. Every time they got it they took the wrong decisions and eventually found themselves having to defend another line out in their 22 and the well drilled Sidcup line out set up the maul and drove over from 15 yards out. 19-17. There were then flickers of Medway's attacking threat and one such raid saw the Sidcup full back bundled into touch with the ball. To prove his well known hypothesis that props are the most intelligent players on the field - Essenhigh took a quick throw to fly half Alfie Orris. After his initial shock at getting the ball he ran across the field to score in the far corner, whilst virtually every player from both sides was thinking about where they were going for a drink tonight. Crucially he converted the try from the touchline. 26-17.

Once again Medway went back to giving Sidcup every opportunity to win the game and it was during a fierce contest at a ruck that Mo Pangarker found himself being pushed over by an opposition player and landing behind the ball on the Sidcup side. The ref judged that this was intentional and sent him off for 10 minutes. Medway coped with this well, undoubtedly helped by the introduction of former matinee idol - Huw Collings - who looked like a traffic cop in downtown Rangoon - arms and gestures telling players where to go and generally making a nuisance of himself to Medway's advantage. What no one was doing unfortunately was making sure that when Medway had good possession they forced Sidcup back into their own 22. So they kept inviting Sidcup to have another go. With 12 minutes to go coach Essenhigh was shown a yellow card for being too quick at a maul and for being too orange. His look of innocent disbelief was shared by the spectators - too quick- really? The orange bit we can understand. So it was at the next scrum that the Medway pack welcomed a father and son moment as Ayob Pangarker joined the front row and proved as awkward to the Sidcup front row as Ess had been. With only 3 minutes to go Sidcup scored a well executed backs try in the corner as the Medway defence tried too hard and over read the play when there was no real need - so a disappointing try to concede after all their defensive effort. The conversion attempt from the touchline fell short. 26-24. The last couple of minutes saw Sidcup trying all they could to get the winning score and Medway defending bravely. When the ref blew for full time there was relief from Medway and frustration for Sidcup.

There is no question that the Medway side have great attitude, shirk no physical challenges and have a lot of potential. However if they are to progress as a team and as individuals they need to pay more attention to their game management and be prepared to make decisions on the field that make sense for the team.

E.I.Addio - your man on the touchline shouting "is anyone listening to me?" and getting the reply "who said that?".

**Squad:** Paul Essenhigh, Mark Coveney, Al Waterman, Luke Osborne, Tom Sandison, Mo Pangarker, Toby Gerdes-Hansen, Jordan Stubbington, George Simpson, Alfie Orris, Conor Chalmers, Sam Sharpe, Sam Pearson, Matt Brightman, Rhys Burns, Ayob Pangarker, Huw Collings, Ben Edgar