

Medway (Extra 1st) 28 Sevenoaks (II) 7 - 02nd January 2016

If anyone was expecting a warm and welcoming afternoon to the New Year then they were most definitely disappointed, nay shocked by the conditions. As the reluctant spectators trudged towards the exposed "top pitch" muttering about " why aren't we playing somewhere nearer the clubhouse" they could console themselves that they, at least, weren't playing. For this game was played in horrid conditions, with a strong wind blowing directly across the pitch, which meant that the almost continuous rain was at times horizontal and quite literally "in your face". So it is great credit to both teams that they gave the competitors such a keenly contested game to watch and whilst it meant that the play was not very pretty, there were passages of which stood out for their quality. Special praise must go to both teams number 8's, scrum halves and fly halves who dealt with the very difficult conditions very well on a pitch that thankfully provided a good playing surface for all 80 minutes.

Having survived the journey to the pitch Sevenoaks showed a real determination to come away with a win and for the first 10 minutes pinned the home side into the infamous Borstal corner. With the wind blowing a gale across the pitch towards the corner it would be very difficult for any team to work their way out and it took Medway a little time to establish composure and move down the pitch. An early chance was not taken when Sam Sharpe broke clear but his pass did not go to hand. Inevitably every time they lost possession Medway were pinned back by good kicking into their own 22. Then from one such kick the ball was run back in the shelter of the spectators and good interpassing involving Burns, Brightman, Stubbington and Simpson resulted in quick possession which was moved across the field to Fernyhough who broke through the line and fed centre Bobby Ellis for a good team try, which somehow fly half Orris converted into the wind. 7-0. Ellis had come on for John Rumsey who had decided, following yet another facial injury, that he would rather shiver on the touchline than risk his good looks (?). Sevenoaks came straight back and took control of the game and through their pack camped on the Medway line. They were being helped by a penalty count of 8-1 in their favour and eventually it told as Medway ran out of defenders and Sevenoaks crashed over for a try which their fly half also did well to convert, 7-7. With half time looming Medway managed to wrestle their way into their opponents half and showing a little patience began to punch a few holes in the defensive line. Prominent in this was Ellis, who nearly touched down and when the ball was recycled it was moved efficiently to centre Sam Sharpe to score to the right of the posts for a try that was again converted. HT 14-7.

The second half was a case of more of the same, especially the weather and Sevenoaks continued to compete in every aspect of the game, which coupled with the conditions made for a compelling and rugged contest. There was very little to choose between the two teams, although as the game wore on the Medway pack was showing real dominance in the scrums. Eventually as Medway learnt to be more direct in the forward play they got quicker possession and began to move the ball more freely. The backs began to make more half breaks and were unfortunate to have a try disallowed for a forward pass by the refs eagle eye. However shortly afterwards a short flat pass from Orris to Ellis saw him punch a hole clean through the defence and the ball was then worked to number 8 Eanna Flanagan for a try close to the posts. 21 -7. On a day like this it was a case of more attrition and as Medway's pack tightened its grip they spurned penalty kicks for scrums and as they thought they had scored a pushover try following a controlled drive over 10 yards they were surprised to see the ref under the cross bar indicating a penalty try. Final score 28-7.

So a really good contest and a credit to both teams. Also the players really appreciated the good number of spectators who chose not to stay in the bar and stood watching them in truly poor conditions - a decision they probably spent some time debating in the club house afterwards.

E.I. Addio - your man on the touchline asking himself, how did the ref stay some clean and cheerful, why was Taff Gwilliam wearing his Christmas present Chinos on a day like this and was it the festive ale or sheer giddiness that caused the 1st XV Manager to throw himself on the ground in the 2nd half? Happy New Year one and all!

Squad: Sam Brice, Paul Morant, Ross Cooley, Luke Osborne, Joe Fernyhough, JOrdan Stubbington, Mo Pangarker, Eann Flanagan, George Simpson, Alfie Orris, Conor Chalmers, Sam Sharpe, John Rumsey, Matt Brightman, Rhys Burns, Al Waterman, Bobby Ellis