

## **Medway 28 Sidcup 41 (London South 1) – 13th February 2016**

An unchanged Medway team to the one that had beaten Chobham the week before, lined up to face Sidcup on Saturday, a side they had lost to by a solitary point when the two teams met in South London last October. The two teams currently lie third and fourth in the league, and thus another closely fought match was expected. In this game, Sidcup trailed Medway 14 points to 3 after 35 minutes, but grew stronger and stronger and eventually won the game comfortably via a strong second half performance. Their forwards gave Medway a torrid time at the scrum, their line out was good, and their backs had a cutting edge that Medway's defence struggled to contain.

Medway opened the game brightly and immediately tested Sidcup's defence. However, lack of numbers at a wide breakdown allowed Sidcup to turn over the ball and from a speculative punt down field Medway were penalised at the next breakdown presenting Sidcup with a simple 3 point penalty from their first possession of the game.

Medway took the lead after 20 minutes when they kicked a penalty to the corner. A good lineout catch and drive allowed hooker Billy Sandison to claim the touch down. Harvey converted and the locals were 7 – 3 to the good. Medway dominated the next ten minutes and played their best rugby of the match. Two golden try scoring opportunities were missed, but eventually the pressure paid off when centre Ben Dance burst through the Sidcup line and when he was stopped inches short, Max Easton drove over from the break down to score under the posts. Harvey's simple conversion gave Medway a healthy looking 14 – 3 lead after 34 minutes.

Sidcup's scrum had already shown its power, but two minutes before half time, they cleanly took a ball against the head on Medway's 22, and then expertly exploited a three on two up the blind side to score a good try to get them back into the game. An outstanding touch line conversion left them only trailing by 14 to 10 at half time. Medway were good value for their half time lead, but would need to kick on in the second half to secure the game.

Early second half exchanges were even, but after 8 minutes Sidcup's scrum again won a decisive Medway ball against the head. This time the blind side break was just sniffed out short of the Medway line, but from the recycled ball, a clever cross field kick picked out Sidcup's unmarked winger to score their second try and give the visitors a 15 – 14 lead.

Sidcup now had their tails up and extended their lead via a penalty try after 13 minutes when Medway were adjudged to have illegally pulled down their driving maul. Immediately from the restart, Medway attacked and the referee equalled things up when he awarded Medway a similar penalty try as Sidcup were also penalised for pulling down a driving maul, 22 – 21.

From this lifeline, Medway hoped they might be back in the game, but an error straight from the kick off presented Sidcup easy possession, good hands and strong running allowed them to breach the home defence and take an eight point lead again.

Sidcup extended their lead further on 29 minutes when good forward power play from the scrum gave them another 7 pointer. Their sixth, and final try, came after 34 minutes via a line out driving maul. Medway rallied in the final five minutes, James Dance took a quick penalty and he fed Doug Ebanks who showed great power to force his way over and score Medway's fourth try to secure them a bonus point.

Overall, Medway had no complaints and were well beaten by a very good, experienced and strong Sidcup side. Their forwards put Medway to the sword, their half backs were efficient, controlling the game well, often via a better kicking game. An entertaining game for the spectators with ten tries scored, six for Sidcup and four for Medway.

Medway travel to local rivals Maidstone next Saturday, who are a form side at present. Kick-off 2.30pm at the Mote.

Medway's team;

Petch, Sandison, O'Leary, Easton, Rutherford, Huntley, Fernyhough, Gardner, J Dance, Harvey, Burns, B Dance, Liua'ana, Ebanks, Garofalo Subs; M Matappa, Weobley, Wardzynski (all used).