

## Medway 35 Blackheath Heathens 19 (Kent Cup R1) – 12th October 2017

On a pleasant autumnal evening, Medway took on Blackheath Heathens (their 2<sup>nd</sup> XV) in Round 1 of the Sheperd Neame Kent Cup under flood lights at Priestfields. The game turned out to be a great spectacle for the large crowd as both sides played open, fast, physical rugby and the result remained in the balance until midway through the second half. Medway had held a narrow 10 – 7 advantage at the interval, the scores remained locked at 15 – 14 after 55 minutes but gradually as the game moved into the final quarter Medway's relentless pressure enabled them to pull away and secure the game by a reasonably comfortable margin.

The home side played into the slight breeze in the first half and it took a while to settle as their changed line-up adjusted to playing together. Fly-half Brad Ford, kicked a penalty after 8 minutes to give Med's an early lead, but Blackheath quickly responded with an excellent converted try, following wave after wave of attack, 7 – 3 to the visitors.

Medway enjoyed territorial and possession advantage but each attack was met by a black wall of solid Blackheath defence. Medway kept battering away and eventually Blackheath's indiscipline resulted in a yellow card for their influential second row. Clinically, the home side immediately took the advantage as the forwards drove a 5 metre scrum back over the line allowing Jordan Stubbington to touch down. Ford's excellent touch-line conversion gave Med's the 10 – 7 half time lead.

Medway's dominance grew in the second period as their forwards gained an advantage at the set piece and their backs punched holes in the tiring Blackheath defence. Brad Ford beautiful kicking from hand and tee kept the visitors pinned back, deep inside their own half. On the rare occasion Blackheath did secure good ball, they continued to look dangerous and assembled sustained, patient attacks that were difficult for the home side to defend. Medway opened the second half scoring when good line out ball was carried up the middle by Sam Sharpe and then quickly recycled to Ben Dance who released Rhys Burns for a try in the corner. Blackheath immediately reduced the deficit with another well-crafted try, 15 – 14. From then on however, Medway's relentless pressure enabled them to draw away. Two penalty kicks from Ford, followed by an excellent team try, powerfully finished by Sam Sharpe gave the home side an unassailable 28 – 14 lead with 12 minutes remaining.

Blackheath again showed their resilience and class with another great try following multiple sweeping phases of attack. Not to be out done, Medway responded with a catch a drive allowing Stubbington to peel off the back of the maul and score his second try of the game.

Overall a good night's work by the home side that again shows the depth to their squad. Coach Taff Gwilliam said, "I am pleased with the performance this evening, we mixed the team up to rotate the squad, and those that came in acquitted themselves brilliantly. Well done to everyone who stepped up to overcome a very stiff challenge from a quality Blackheath side."