

CS Rugby 1863 19 Medway 10 (London 1 South) - 10th March 2018

Medway travelled to Chiswick on Saturday to take on league leaders CS Rugby. With Medway lying just a single point behind them in the league this was an eagerly awaited top of the table clash. As befitting the positions of these two teams and their styles of play an entertaining and closely fought match was expected and that was just what was served up. Medway played into a stiff breeze in the first half and were soon on the back foot when they failed to deal with a high ball which the home side recovered and then pressed the Medway line. Good initial defence prevented the score but eventually the home fly half found the space to scamper over for the unconverted try.

CS Rugby continued to press and were soon camped on the Medway line again and awarded a 5m scrum. Medway responded with the front row of Cooley, Gardner and O'Leary forcing their opposite numbers to stand up under the pressure. Medway cleared their lines through the boot of Harvey. As the half progressed Medway grew more into the game. Good ball retention and patient build up saw the home side concede penalties at the breakdown. Off one such penalty Harvey kicked Medway into the home 22. Medway secured the line out possession through Easton and Hawkins and attacked in midfield. Good recycling and several quick ball phases later CS rugby were scrambling to get their defence in place. James Dance seeing the defenders trying to keep width on the outside exploited the space at the ruck edge to scamper over beating the cover defence for a fine individual try. Harvey kicked the conversion and Medway were ahead 7-5. On 31 minutes Medway's game plan of retaining possession against the elements bore more fruit as the CS Rugby penalty count mounted. The referee lost patience with the home side resulting in their No 8 being sent to the sin bin for 10 minutes. Harvey had a chance to extend the lead but the kick drifted wide of the post. Just a few minutes later Medway were also reduced to 14 men themselves when they, having won a penalty at the breakdown, saw the home scrum half take a quick tap and play even though not his penalty. James Dance reacted and tackled him for which he was sent to the sin bin for 10 minutes and the penalty reversed. A simple kick in front of the posts was missed by CS.

Medway then lost the influential back row player Beaumont to a cut head. He was replaced by young Dan O'Brien and the sides went into half time with Medway leading 7-5. Medway had played a great half of rugby and deserved the lead they had fought hard to achieve. Harvey had managed the game well and everyone worked hard in support.

The second half started with Medway kicking the ball dead. From the resultant scrum back at the half way CS secured possession and following a series of phases eventually score out wide through their fly half again and an excellent conversion saw CS lead by 12 -7. At the restart Medway conceded a penalty and CS cut loose and created an overlap for their right wing to score. Again this was excellently converted from the touchline and CS pushed their lead out to 19-7. This was clinical rugby. Medway had made three errors in the game and conceded 3 tries as a consequence. Although down 19-7 Medway brought on the hard working Whitnell to replace Cooley who had done his job well. Medway continued to attack the home side. Centre Henry Hall was replaced by Sam Sharp. Hall had suffered a heavy knock to the chest earlier and with a tight hamstring as well was withdrawn. On 57 minutes Harvey kicked a penalty to narrow the gap to 19-10. Medway continued to create pressure, good ball carrying from Stubbington, Gardner and Clement supported by Ben Dance and O'Leary tested the CS Defence but it was resolute. Medway then lost key line out exponent Hawkins to injury and this impacted as Medway having secured great field position in the home 22 failed to secure the resultant line outs. On 69 minutes Harvey had another long range penalty but it just missed the upright and with CS defending well Medway were denied the bonus point. CS ran out deserved winners on the day avenging their defeat at Medway earlier in the season. They were clinical in punishing the few mistakes made by Medway and their defence of the second half was top drawer.

The Medway team although beaten never stopped working and can take pride from their performance against a top quality side. Next week Medway take on Brighton at home in a re-arranged fixture.