

Medway 55 Gravesend 14 (London South 1) 21st April 2018

Medway entertained local rivals Gravesend in a match where they knew a win would secure a promotion play off place. A good crowd had assembled boosted by over 100 club Vice Presidents, Sponsors and their guests sat down for a pre-match lunch.

On a warm sunny day with firm underfoot conditions the game kicked off and with Medway securing possession they were soon on the front foot. With just 2 minutes on the clock the visitors were penalised at the breakdown in front of the posts. Dan Harvey kicked the penalty for Medway to take the lead 3-0. Medway then lost centre Doug Ebanks to injury. He was replaced by Antony Clement. On 7 minutes Gravesend again transgressed and Harvey added another 3 points to lead 6-0. Immediately from the resultant kick off Jordan Stubbington secured possession and strong carries from Mike Gardner and Josh Hawkins backed up by some excellent handling by Tom Beaumont and Antony Clement gave Alfie Orris the space on the half way line and he raced away from the cover defence to score. Harvey added the extras and Medway had their dream start. 13-0. On 12 minutes a long clearance kick from Medway's half went deep into the visitors 22 and good follow up pressure from James Dance saw another penalty conceded by Gravesend. Harvey kicked the points and Medway led 16-0. Gravesend are not a team that gives in and they gradually started to gain a foothold in the game with some driving play up the middle. It was Medway's turn to concede a penalty in front of the posts. Sadly for Gravesend this chance went astray. Medway punished this miss when Harvey kicked another penalty with the visitors transgressing at the breakdown once more. 19-0. The final score of the first half came when Medway secured line out possession and Harvey orchestrated a strike move with Luke Burns racing over for a well executed try. Harvey converted and Medway led 26-0 at half time. The first period of the second half was all Gravesend. Showing pride and determination led by Temi Okenla, Gary Gary and Zac Lewis they scored a fine try out wide. This despite a great last ditch covering effort from Sam Garofalo. Rhys Bettes got an excellent touchdown in the corner and with the touchline conversion from his own boot narrowed the gap to 26-7. They soon added another 3 points from Bettes after Medway conceded back to back penalties to make the score 26-10. Medway had lost a bit of focus and needed to re-assert themselves. The Medway scrum with Sandison, Gardner and O' Leary dominating their counterparts and with Hawkins stealing opposition lineout ball Medway were soon back on the front foot. A Medway line out inside Gravesend 22m saw the accurate Sandison throw secured by Max Easton, the ball was re-cycled well for Tom Beaumont to score and with the ever reliable boot of Harvey adding the extras Medway now led 36-10.

Following the re-start Medway knocked on but from the Gravesend scrum Medway turned the ball over and the ball was moved quickly by Dance, Harvey and Clement for Sam Sharpe to go outside his man and score a well taken try out wide. Harvey was on target and the score went out to 43-10. Gravesend for their part never gave up and a kick behind the Medway defence was re-gathered for Gravesend's stand out player Temi Okenla who managed to offload to Gary Brett and he ran in to score. The conversion from Rhys Bettes made the score 43-17. On 33 minutes Medway were camped on the Gravesend line and a succession of scrums were frustratingly re-set despite Medway driving for the line. Eventually Medway did score. Scrum possession securing the ball and with excellent hands from the backs Alfie Orris powered over for his second try which was unconverted. With 37 minutes remaining Medway's final try of the game again came from hard won ball by the forwards and good handling from backs. Orris combined with Sharpe for Sharpe to score his second try of the match with the conversion good from Harvey Medway ran out winners by 55 points to 17. To Gravesend's credit, although relegated, they showed pride and determination and battled hard. With Cutting, Bird, Goss and Wilkins all missing from their line up it was always going to be a difficult game but they never gave up and Medway were forced to work very hard for the victory. For Medway's part they had secured the all important play off place and now take on Essex side Chingford for the final promotion spot. Coach Taff Gwilliam said "Overall this was a job well done. The boys have worked hard all season and thoroughly deserve this chance". He added "We have bested some very strong teams over the course of the season and this young side is ever improving....Chingford will be tough place to go but we are up for the challenge" The game takes place at Chingford RFC next Saturday 28th April.