

Maidstone Barbarians 33 – 19 Aylesford 4th XV (20 Oct 2012)

TRYS: Nunn (2), Knight (2) Tuffrey

TRYS: 3 No

info on hand from Aylesford.

CONS: Nunn (1), Seal (3)

CONS: 2 No info on hand
from Aylesford.

Despite missing their experienced Front Row Trinity of Arthurs, Bradley and Craven, the Barbarians lined up on the top pitch with a very strong side on an almost perfect day for Rugby against the old enemy. It was clear that on-field Captain Colin Frost was determined to lead by example, putting the 'Stones through their paces with some stern words and a well drilled warm up. There was barely time to notice that the Bull's had turned up with a quite hefty looking Samoan at 8 and just to compound matters, a slightly smaller gentleman from the same strong Rugby heritage background at 12.

It was clear from the off that Aylesford's game plan was to set free the Samoan tank at 8 and shift the ball quickly to his counterpart at 13 for the scores. As the Maidstone forwards contained the Bull's pack, the Barbarian backs shut down the advances of the spritely 12 and powerful 13 in the middle of the park. As it turns out, Maidstone's first try came from this very situation. In broken play, the Bulls were looking to launch another attack in the centre of the pitch as arguably their best player of the day at 12 made the first of many powerful angled runs. On this occasion a diving tackle from fly-half Tuffrey caught onto his shoulders and forced him to the ground. Such was the impact of the fall, the ball spilled loose and 'Ace' Knight introduced the first display of the day of his football skills, hacking the ball forward and chasing down to go over for Maidstone's first score. With the place kick duties passed to Simon Seal for the day, Seal duly converted.

As Aylesford regrouped and concluded that it was just a breakaway try, back they came keeping possession very well. Again the great Barbarian tackling, reinforced by Trev's Thursday Tackle Training, at the fringes and in the centre meant that for all the visitors' possession, they couldn't get near the 'Stones 22. In contributing to the stout defence, James Greengrow had to leave the pitch after suffering a twist to his ankle when a lumbering forward crashed down onto it like a piano from a 3rd floor window. This unfortunately meant that he could not return to action in this game. The Bulls did get their first shot on goal around 25 metres out after an indiscretion, but saw their effort slide just wide.

If there were to be signs of a difference in these two well drilled teams, it began to show a little later on, as Maidstone's second try came with almost every player contributing in the build up. The forwards, marshalled by the ever-outstanding Gilles moved up the pitch on the left hand side, advancing towards the 'sweet' smell of the Somme. Mike Oakley drove forward and recycled well, before another phase saw Will Fox go crashing through like he should have the word CAT in big black letters on his side. Fox crashed through like a bulldozer through the forest of players, advancing to the Bulls 5 metre line. From there the ball quickly came out to Tuffrey, who immediately got the attention of the opposition 10 & 12. A quick off-load to the well placed Nunn, meant an easier passage through the Bull's dog-legged defence for the Barbarians 2nd try. Another try - duly converted.

As the running game wasn't working, the experienced Bulls 10 resorted to a kicking game. This was well fielded by Hodges, Hudson and Carpenter. All of whom took some very difficult high balls with

aplomb and even returned with interest. Some better than others it has to be said, as a certain winger made three yards before deciding to try a 6 yard up n' under when maybe running into the 15 yards of grass he had in front of him may have been a better option(!). A lack of concentration allowed the Bulls the initiative and they finally broke into the Barbarian 22. With some powerful forwards work and quick hands, they got on the score board with a converted Try. This reminded Maidstone 5s that any lapses in concentration would certainly be punished by this Bulls 4th team.

With heads back on, another forward barrage from the MMB resulted in take two of the overzealous 10 & 12 rush defence. Great work in the loose by Mark Ingram & Steve Skipp meant more decimation by the CAT Will Fox allowing the Barbarians to advance into enemy territory. Tom Clarke pushed forward once more with his two pennies worth of progression. Eventually the ball came out to Tuffrey and that 10 & 12 rush defense was once more proved fatal as Richard Nunn went through on another excellent run to turn & face his appreciative team mates, before gently kissing the turf with the ball for his second Try. He enjoyed it so much he even converted it as well.

The half time break came with wise words from Coach Frost that MMB were not out of the woods yet. Aylesford are a very dangerous side but the commitment of each and every Barbarian was the sole reason for being in such a strong position. The slightly more petite Ulsterman, Dave Coffey was a welcome return for the Barbarians and proved invaluable as he put in several tackles to stem the encouraged red tide. The start of the second half was a wakeup call as at last that big Number 8 set himself about the fringes causing great tackles from Gilles, Knight, Ingram, Clarke and an exceptional backward driving thump by Nunn to be needed. Eventually with bodies spread the gap opened and Aylesford went over for their second score. A score that gave them hope and reassured them that they were more than capable of toppling the Barbarians off of their current perch.

Ex Skipper Steve Quinn came on to help the Barbarian pack and as usual put in some good hits and provided strong resistance within the Scrum.

After a clearance kick and some more enterprising forwards phases, the Barbarians found themselves in the opposition 22'. (!). As the bodies flew in, Aylesford regained possession, only to have Tuffrey rip it from the Full Backs arms to return it to the Barbarians. A ruck in the corner lead to a punch being thrown and the visitors rightfully reduced to 14 men. This allowed the forwards more flexibility to push on and over to the right hand side of the Bulls 22. As more and more red forwards pounded in to make up the numbers, Gilles passed left to Seal who, faced with two, offloaded to Hodges (we have still not worked out how the FB ended up there?!) and Mr Hodges spun the perfect pass to Tuffrey. Once again the 10 & 12 rush was on, except this time, focusing their attentions on Richard Nunn to Tuffrey's left. Playing heads up rugby, it was like the parting of the Red Sea, the gap was there for Tuffrey to side step the advancing forward and run through the gap left by 10 & 12 unscathed. A more comfortable cushion meant that the missed conversion by Seal, who had an above and beyond complete game at 8, was not too much to worry about.

Back Aylesford came though continuing to exert pressure and their stellar 12 went racing through making a superb angle for himself, avoiding the tackle of Hodges who in turn got to Tuffrey's head first with his knee which helped the 12 gain those extra yards and cross the line for the 2nd converted Try.

At this point it should be mentioned that Dennigan Tyson was putting in a performance of his own...as hydration technician & physiotherapist. His service was thorough and well appreciated by his team mates.

Maidstone did not want to let this game slip and everyone rallied to take the fight again to the scarlet force that had finally seemed to start clicking.

As Aylesford came once more, the tackles were flying in again. Quinn made a great hit, followed by Oakley & Ingram. As Aylesford advanced, a stonking hit by Seal just inside their half saw the ball spill loose and Knight was off again on the 'Wembley' turf of the 1st XV pitch seemingly chipping the ball forward for half the length, to score in between the right hand post and touchline. Seal once again converted. With the clock ticking and bodies bruised, some great turnover play in the middle of the park saw the ball worked superbly through the hands as Maidstone had numbers on the left. Mr Hodges was set free like an elegant Gazelle with only three labouring backs trying to run towards him to hunt him down from the right. With Mike Oakley in great support on the left & acres of space to go over & Steve Jones in support to his right, Mr Hodges got to within 10 metres of the line. Seeing the oncoming three backs to his right, the experienced Hodges knew that all he had to do was offload to his left to send Oakley over the line. Only he knows why on earth he passed right to Steve Jones who was promptly pounced on by the baying three defenders!

As Maidstone regained possession, either a terrible Drop Goal attempt (maybe a year ago it would have sailed over?) or a deft cross field grubber could have seen the Barbarian winger in for a Try. But, alas, the Aylesford Full Back was first on the scene.

The lineout was also a feature that worked well for the Barbarians & and after winning the umpteenth, the ball was soon dispatched into the area vacated by the stand & the final whistle blew.

This victory was not just down to one individual performance, but several. Neither was it down to just one man's ego....but probably several! It was really just down to good players, who like to train together and play together, who like each other, all pulling their own weight in their own way irrespective of experience or ability.

The difference between two good sides on the day? The Barbarians trusted and used all of their team mates around them, as well as utilizing their own abilities to go forward instead of relying on a few individuals to get them 'over the line'. It was a performance that perhaps even the 1st would have been proud of and would have approved on their pitch. It doesn't really matter what team number is on that shirt or the level you want to enjoy your rugby....the only name that counts, is MAIDSTONE!

Finally, a mega thanks to Carol for the celebratory drink afterwards. Hopefully there will be days like this every week, for every team, for we are MAIDSTONE FC.