

Maidstone Barbarians 24 - 19 Gravesend V

Trys: Griffiths, Rush, PM9, Knight
Cons: Rush (2)

Trys: No. 14, No. 11, No. 22
Cons: No.10 & No.22

Friendly: The Mote, Bottom Pitch. Saturday 10th November. Kick-off 13:30

As the autumn Internationals began this week bringing with it the damp ground and crisp air that says 'Rugby weather is well and truly upon us', the MMB had a friendly game against Gravesend V's which pleasantly lived up to its billing.

Due to commitment issues and without the "veteran" experience of Eiffert, Arthurs, Jones and Neseyif who went off to suss out our league opposition in Sheppey, both teams only had 16 players and many of them casualties, such as the Gravesend skipper, limping to the coin toss with the stand in MMB skipper for the day Tuffrey. Regular Captain Ausher had a shirt ready just in case but was on the sides in need of a rest, especially as his right eye looks like something that would happen only if you went up to a young Mike Tyson and said 'Excuse me Shorty, you are in my way you poof!'

The MMB preparations was once again unique and can only be found at this level of Rugby...well you'd think(!) Fox trundling in the warm up and having to stop for fear of the skinful the night before coming back up. Hudson finding the time to vomit every ten minutes and a certain winger who will remain nameless, having to leave his underwear in a Café somewhere in or around Staplehurst, thanks to an attack from the previous evening's excursion. Add to this a certain Loose Head who seemed to be trying to injure one of our Centres in the warm up by standing on his Achilles or by breaking his fingers by passing him the ball whilst he had his hands full.

The game kicked off shortly after 13:30 with the MMB attacking the Mote Park End. Due to the weather conditions, the plan was to stick it with the forwards before thinking of spreading anything wide. With the likes of Will 'The CAT' Fox, Clarke, Ingram & Soles in the pack, making ground with barrelling runs was a threat that MMB had this week in their arsenal. It did not take too long to see that this was certainly a way to go as ground was made up the left hand side very well and hopefully, Coach Frost could stand on the sideline with a deserved grin on his face as Maidstone V's began putting into practice the support work ethic that he had been teaching for many weeks on a Thursday night.

The 5/8 Will Rush making a guest appearance for the MMB used Tuffrey as a crash Centre and quickly made the observation that the opposition numbers did not seem that interested in tackling. With a dazzling run from Alex Soles, of which there were many in the match, the play spread over to right hand side where the excellent Scrum-Half released Fox at the back of a ruck to charge for the line. As Fox got within 5 metres with 4 players dragging him to the ground like a pack of animals taking down much larger prey, somehow, somehow, he managed to get the ball back. As support piled in from Tuffrey, Ingram & Carpenter, Hudson arrived at the back to reach in and snatch up the ball. Showing the ever growing maturity of his Rugby brain, he stepped towards the line sucking two players in, before off loading to a well placed Gary Griffiths to charge over the line for the first score. With the kick 10 metres to the right of the post, Rush made sure of maximum points.

The Maidstone tackling was fierce and committed which was epitomized soon after. A break away down the wing from Gravesend in broken play saw their 13 through towards the MMB 22'. Only to have Paul Hodges take him out with a superb tackle forcing the 13 to the ground, long enough for fellow support to arrive and eventually Maidstone to clear their lines. There are some moments in a game that are forgotten due to the amount of Try's scored by an individual or even an error of judgement. These forgotten moments can in fact prove vital in the outcome of the 80mins. So, the day before remembrance Sunday as we do not forget those who fought for our freedom, lest we forget the pink wall that stood at the back of the MMB line this day. Shortly after as the only down side to Maidstone's play began to creep in, the fear of diving on a loose ball, Gravesend broke away again down the right hand side. With some excellent covering working by Greengrow, Gravesend had to come back inside just metres from the Maidstone line. Hodges made yet another tackle, stopping another Try from being scored. Again Maidstone recovered and cleared their lines. In what felt like a sucker punch before half-time to a fantastic driving, heads up Rugby running game from the MMB, Gravesend got over the line in the right hand corner after an overlap appeared. In reflection, the score was less than Gravesend deserved having nearly scored twice already. 7-5 at the

break & all to play for.

In the second half both teams felt a little cagey. One having felt like letting a lead slip and were in fear of going off the boil. The other team, in fear that they had got back into the game & didn't want to make a mistake again. Maidstone attacked freshly with some excellent play coming through Scott Andrews, supporting his Centre partner very well with another fine performance in what has been so far been an excellent season for Andrews. Let's hope he keeps his feet on the ground and doesn't get carried away with himself to continue this into 2013. With his forwards head on, Will Rush popped up to the left hand side of the ruck as the extra man as Maidstone rallied to the near touchline attacking the Willow Road End. With great hands from Hodges again to Rush, the latter was over for the Try, heading as close to the posts as possible, when something unforgivable happened. A 5th team player, not scoring a certain Try...surely not. The curse had struck again (as it did a certain FB against Aylesford) Gravesend jumped on the encroaching Rush and....yes...held him up.

This unforgivable travesty and a certain Jug offence, as Bob Purfitt of whom it was good to see on the sidelines reminded everyone oh so well, Rush needed to make amends. Within 3 minutes in a carbon copy move he was over the line again and this time made no hesitation in planting the ball on the wet turf. It was suggested to him that as things were now even, it was double or quits on the conversion. He missed. The MMB still awaits it Jug!

With the spectre of their wounded Ulsterman having just turned up on the sidelines to begin lambasting the troops, Maidstone began coming into their own again and took the barrage to the Gravesend backs & forwards with some powerful drives. Mark Ingram made by now his sixth run, making ground that would make any NFL player proud of his stats. At this point in the game Ausher had been introduced and began putting in the drives that started to cement Maidstone's superior power in the pack. A lovely truck and trailer with the resident CAT made such inroads that a catlike reaction from Scrum Half, sniping his way at the back of a ruck and over the line, gave MMB some breathing room.

There was a switch around in the backs which saw Knight in at 13, with Tuffrey & Rush interchanging at 10. Someone else to mention at this point is winger Dan Hunt who was drifting in and then pulling wide on Maidstone attacks unnoticed causing some expert overlaps. Unfortunately in these conditions, the ball just wasn't coming out through the hands quick enough to make use of his trickery and pace. Gravesend began to rally by now and was beginning to make a few breakaways as they spread the ball wide. They must have been thinking that the only way to get points on the board was away from the forwards. It was actually reported from the side line that after a spillage from a Gravesend player, his team mate enquired why he had done what he had done. In response the offending man retorted "I was trying to keep it away from their bloody forwards!" Gravesend's more experienced 10 came on and seemed to give them a lift, interplaying very well with the 13 who was probably their best attacking threat all game. As the black and white might moved forward shipping the ball out wide to the far touchline, Maidstone were feeling the pressure. Inside the Maidstone 22 once again after some scramble clearances from the home team, the visitors pushed and probed for the opening. As the ball came out to the substitute 10, in line with the Maidstone posts, he did a delightful dummy switch with 13 sneaking between the 'Stones 12 & 13 and going over himself for a converted score.

Gravesend pushed on and Maidstone's tackling was once again proving invaluable as Carpenter, Ingram, Ausher, Fox & the backs were forcing the tide outwards and away from the whitewash of the MMB Try line. Clarke made the first of many runs from the back of the ruck and motored on causing several oppositions players to take him down. By the third successive drive of Clarke, Ausher and Ingram, the black & white might was breathing hard. As play spread to the left Maidstone were back on top & it was Gravesend who now had to tackle to stay in the game. More and more attention was placed on the advancing forwards as Fox, Clarke & Ausher pressed forward. On the right wing, Hunt pulled wide again in acres of space. The ball was called out and our #9 swung the egg out to Rush who charged forward taking the flanker & 10 towards him, a perfectly timed offload to Tuffrey saw the overlap on. As Tuffrey drew the attentions of the 12 & 13, a further well timed pass saw Knight with just the winger to take on, who was preoccupied by the position of his opposite number in Hunt. This gave the gap Knight needed to once again give distance between the MMB & the visitors. With the conversion to be taken in the middle of the uprights, Rush added the extras. Now with 24 points on the board and ten minutes left, all the MMB had to do was hold on.

As the kick off came again the Maidstone V's pushed forward. Clarke yet again charged onwards and was forced out into touch. As Gravesend won their line out & the desire to get back into dangerous MMB territory, they hoofed the ball up field to a lonely pink sock wearing figure of Mr Hodges. Taking the ball on the bounce he beat the first on

coming man. And then the second. Then the THIRD? Finally the fourth man made contact....and bounced off the Maidstone Full Back(!) The fifth mans attempt of a tackle was seen off by a spin, worthy of any ballerina in those pink socks! Eventually in keeping in true tradition, his off load was poor and ensured the bar was not set too high for future games. With tired legs all around, Gravesend managed one final push and their after some more stout MMB defence, the line was broken on the far touchline again as their winger just grounded the ball before Rush took him out into touch in the dead ball area. As the kick was being set up, Maidstone prepared themselves for one final push. Only to have the referee give the signal that this would be the last play. The whistle sounded and a great feeling mixed with a sense of relief that despite some switching off, the performance of the pack and did not go for nothing. Despite the Gravesend scores, it was widely felt that a little more concentration in the loose would have kept them out. Maidstone had most of the possession and dominated up front with great support from the backs. How Rugby should be played & won.

Thanks once again to Denny for his efforts once more as Physio, although we think some pain killers & vitamin tablets would have been better served this week than the magic sponge; Pete Bulford for his presence yet again on the side line as well as the resident Ulsterman for lending his vocal support along with the injured Coach Frost.

With easier (on paper) league games to come & performances like that, the MMB should find themselves moving up the table.

Next up:

November 16th: (A) Old Gravesendians II. *Early Bird 6 West*