

Maidstone Barbarians 21 - 15 Gravesend IV

Trys: R. Seal (2) Baker
Cons: Tuffrey (2) R. Seal
Pens:

Trys: No. 5, No. 8 (2)
Cons:
Pens:

Early Bird 6: Mote Park – Top Pitch. Saturday 8th December.

With Skipper Ian on the sideline along with Mr. Arthurs who sadly announced his immediate retirement this week, it was down to the mouthy Ulsterman to Captain the side with Coach Frost on hand to add his influence on the finer points. As soon as Maidstone kicked off they found themselves on the front foot and seemed to panic in the opposition 22. Clearly, they were not expecting to be on the offensive so early on in the exchange.

The Home side's first Try came after a couple of good drives that had earned them 22 metre scrum on the right hand side. With the grunt of the 'CAT', the Ulsterman & the hooking skills of those massive calves from Ingram, the ball came out and the superb Andy Bell at #9 shot the ball across to Tuffrey at 10. With Gravesend advancing, a fired miss pass to Rob Seal at 13, gave the latter some space. That usually being all he needs, Rob Seal darted back inside the dog-leg left in defence by the miss pass and drove through the last baying tacklers to touch down just right of the upright. Tuffrey converted to give Maidstone a 7 – 0 lead.

It was great to see that the Maidstone V's have been working hard in training & taking heed of the wisdom installed each and every week by those involved. Even when not training, you could see that some had the passion to watch key International matches to see how to address the issues they may have. In this instance, at the breakdown against Sheppey, bodies would fly in to leave more holes than a rusty colander in defence. Not today. If the ball was lost then it was accepted and the defence realigned so there was nothing for Gravesend to do, except stuff it up their jumpers. It was unfortunate that despite the much improved defensive line, the press wasn't quick enough and the big No.8 broke through a tackle and was in for the score. A sucker punch, but the MMB knew that they were the better side, for now at least. It was not long before the visitors tails were up and Maidstone was forced to defend hard in the top near corner in a scrum. Every time the visitors went to head for the near corner, they were met by Andy Bell & Scott Andrews making last ditch efforts to force them into touch. Due to a knock-on, or some other infringement, Gravesend had three scrum attempts on the 5 that all went the same way.....Out into touch, thanks to Bell & Andrews. Finally, MMB put in an almighty shove to allow Bell to get his hands on the ball and delivery to Tuffrey who dispatched the ball into the safety of the crowd around 30 metres away.

As Gravesend battled hard to once again reply, a blindside run from the back of the scrum and kick forward down the near touchline from Bell, created something from nothing. On the opposing 40, the ball was sent off the Scot's boot down the near touchline and 'RoboScott' Andrews was down the line like a greyhound after the rabbit! As he gathered and headed for the line, just 5 metres out the defence finally got across to make the tackle. The Winger seemingly got the ball down in the corner before the incoming tackle forced his legs into touch. A view not shared by the referee or Gravesend touch judge, who gave a line-out that was just about cleared by the visitors.

Maidstone V's once again found themselves back near the opposition 22 thanks to some excellent flank work from Frost and Simon Seal. With Steve Skipp going quietly and assuredly as usual about his business moving the ball forward and tackling hard, the pack was on song. With Andy Bell once again conducting, it was up to the backs to support the tremendous effort from the forwards. The ball once again out to 10 and a scissor with Rob Seal drew all the attentions as Gravesend was not going to let him in again. 4 Metres out and taking a tackle, a short pop pass to the supporting League convert, Carl Baker on the left, allowed for the gap to be exploited and the supporting Centre to go over for the Try. Tuffrey added the extras once more after seemingly finding his kicking boots again.

14 – 5 at half time but Gravesend IVs are a dogged & a very good side. You only had to look at the league table to know that.

With multiple changes rang at half time by VP Trev to ensure all squad members got a fair run-out, Maidstone V's seemed to lose their way. Gravesend was pushing hard for a score & there was only so many tackles to make. Between Paul Hodges nearly getting his head kicked off (again!) diving onto a ball, to Will Fox grabbing hold of the advancing 12 and frog marching him back 20 metres up the pitch(!) to Tom Clarke bursting forward like he has been

doing almost every week so far, something had to give. Eventually, the No.5 got through the MMB defence and over for another unconverted Try. Maidstone were determined not to let nearly an hours' worth of good play go to waste and came back strong. Unfortunately, in this very watchable game, the visitors came back stronger playing down the slope. Maidstone defended for their lives. Every man stood up, trying to give himself up for the cause. Bodies were starting to ache and bruise. Still the black and white forwards came. Still every MMB player did their bit. With another reshuffle, Simon replaced Baker to join his brother Rob in the Centres where an unusual defensive approach was being taken, to give extra support around the scrums for the No. 8 who was intent on the pick-and-go. Simon stood to the left of Tuffrey at 10 and Rob Seal to the right, just off of the scrum. It seemed to halt the advances just enough for people like Bell, Ingram, Skipp & Clarke to regroup and put in the hits. With players limbs starting to go, with 3 minutes left, the No.8 went over for an unconverted Try to seemingly take the spoils 14 – 15.

The MMB looked hard at each other and did not think it right for the game to end this way. Not when everyone had defended so hard. Not when the forwards had been so exceptional up front & certainly not when that was combined with the backs movement. The Ulsterman Skipper gave rallying words of encouragement and direction to get the MMB heads back on.

The restart was sent down the throat of the Gravesend No. 7 who ran it back on the far side, only to be met by Jason "Taz" Hudson. The ruck formed and the MMB fanned out. The No.8 came and was met by Fox & Carpenter. Again, Maidstone fanned out. With time running out and the Maidstone V's trying to find a legal way of ripping the ball, it was looking desperate. Another pick and go. Another hit and recycle. With the forwards behaving at the breakdown, they just could not get the ball. The Gravesend No.9 placed his hands on the ball and sent the ball to 10, as the space seemed available. A quick Maidstone press saw the 10 seem to panic at the sight of a lumbering Tuffrey who looked like a charging Zombie half limping towards him. A quick, fast paced pass to his left saw the ball whizz past 12 when a big, lone paw reached out to grab the ball from the MMB side. Rob Seal had claimed the interception just inside his own half and ran for his life up the heart of the top pitch heading underneath the sticks to claim the victory. It was only fitting that he should take the conversion himself. A stunning 21 – 15 victory.

Once again everyone had played their part. No matter how small. From the front row heaves, to the second row drives. The No.8 dashes, the No.9 marshalling, the 10's creativity, to the 12 & 13 skills. Right back to the 11, 14 & 15 trinity of speed and recovery. They all defended well too!

Another run out on the 1st team pitch and another victory. Train together, play together & days like this, just might become a little more frequent particularly as the 5s don't play the game for league points, they play it for bonhomie, and pride in the shirt.

Next up: December 15th: (A) Lordswood II. *Early Bird 6W League*

LORDSWOOD SPORTS & SOCIAL CLUB: ME5 8YE

- Lordswood II will be chomping at the bit to play any sort of game. Since the forfeit (yet again) of Aylesford IV's on Nov 17th, this will be the home teams' first game since then. Laying 2nd in the league is no mean feat, however when you consider three victories came by forfeits & they have been beaten by Gravesend IV's already this season on their own muck heap, there is evidence that the MMB horde could stride up the hill, into the Woods and walk away with a victory!