

# Maidstone Barbarians 19 - 12 Old Gravesendians II

Trys: Tuffrey, Hodges, Bell

Trys: No. 12 (2)

Cons: Seal (2)

Cons: No.10

Early Bird 6West : Away at Fleetway Sports Ground. Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> November. Kick-off 14:30

For anyone wanting to know how this game was going at times could easily refer back to the match report against Gravesend. It must be something to do with the locale of the players. In the changing rooms beforehand the opposing skipper came into the MMB dressing room to announce that he had suffered every Captains nightmare – players dropping out at the last minute. This time it turns out that no less than 6 had dropped out late on Saturday morning! As such they only had 13 men and were willing to concede the league points for a loan of two of our players to make it a fair 15 on 15. Well done to Barney Carpenter & Jason Hudson who put in truthful performances and played exceptionally well, even though they had a blue shirt on.

A bit of a reshuffle saw Ben Hughes make his backline bow at 13. He seemed to take to it with aplomb. Despite feeling out of place at times, he did an excellent job with able guidance from the battle-worn Jones and Hodges. So much so, he finished the game there. Hughes even made ground beating two players after performing an excellent 12/13 switch. Proof indeed of the MMB's versatility in training regimes and abilities to adapt when required. Having won the toss, our returning mouthpiece Ulsterman elected for a first half ploy of containment and playing up the hill.

The game kicked off with the hosts attacking down the slope and they quickly pushed the MMB back. Their main attacking weapon became all too clear just ten minutes in when they gained possession on the 40m line. On the far side OG's began to progress forward slightly before releasing the ball to their 10. A snap pass to their 12 meant that the short and sprightly fellow could open up his legs for a gallop. With lateral running he avoided the attentions of Tuffrey & Hughes in the centre and charged forth into the gap between Winger and Full Back. With only 10 metres to catch him, it just wasn't enough and Gravesendians were in by the posts to lead 5-0. Their number 14 'Guppy' celebrated like he had just seen Chelsea score at Stamford Bridge. The conversion was good and Maidstone had to work out what had to be done and also, to wake up as this was still a game to win despite already having league points in the bag. Words could be heard that the backs had decided in order to combat the 13's running threat, that they should impose the old drift defence ploy. So that, when the opposition go wide and the defence drifts with them, their attackers have no choice but to work it back inside. If they did that, with people like, Ausher, Clarke & Fox in the forwards, the attackers would find it difficult to progress any further.

Maidstone tried to clear the cobwebs and Seal was doing a superb job with the boot to clear the lines whenever he was called to do so. It seemed hard work for the MMB up the slope, like a marathon runner training on an inclined treadmill, blowing out air and one could feel quite exasperated just watching it! Ausher made several breaks off the back of the rucks and showed a Captain's example motoring forward with support from his fellow forwards and occasionally the backs. For much of the first half it was a stalemate as every time the MMB got further up the hill, it was quickly ran back down again and tackles had to be made. It would take something a little extra to get back into the game and a moment of dazzling magic. Step forward a certain, motoring forward in Alex Soles. As the Maidstone engine room set themselves for a scrum next to the dugout, just in their own half, they heaved forward. Some excellent hooking against the head by Trevor Bradley, wearing his favoured 'No.1' shirt to add confusion, gained Maidstone the possession. As Andy Bell made another sniping run from the back he set the ball inside to Alex Soles, who was beginning to gain momentum. A superb side step to the right saw him up the hill and away with the MMB running to catch up. As he was looking at the ambush from both sides, a cursory glance to his left saw Dave Smith in support. Offloading neatly to his fellow, if slightly more mature, forward, Soles had released 'Cornish' in line with the posts just 15 metres out. As he looked certain to score, two OG's was starting to get hold of him. A screaming Tuffrey came up on the right and Smith released a peach of a pass, one handed and over the head of the two baying tacklers. Tracking Tuffrey's run was Carpenter on the opposition wing and as Tuffrey stepped inside and got to within touching distance of the line, Carpenter wrapped Tuffrey around the legs like Judas reincarnate. Fortunately for Maidstone, the recently gained weight advantage and momentum was enough for the falling Centre's outstretched arm to get the ball over the line in between the sticks. There were suspicions that he had dropped it in his falling, but as the referee rightly (for a change) pointed out that there was enough downward pressure and control to award the Try. Simon Seal stepped up and elegantly dispatched the ball for the extras.

With Half Time called soon after. The MMB were level with the added bonus of attacking down the hill to come.

After a nervous and yet again some cagey opening exchanges, the forwards began to squeeze a little more, as they had in previous games. Maidstone began the roll down the hill, exerting pressure not only in the scrum, but the resulting line outs just 5 metres from the opposing Try line, thanks to some precise kicks into the corner from Seal. The in-control Bradley started to mix the line outs up and at times begun dropping the ball like a six-pence on Tom Clarkes head at the back for a No.8 charge. With Maidstone making good inroads thanks to Andy Bell's running and the forwards putting the effort in, it seemed like Maidstone had to make use of this pressure.

A return to last season's resplendent pod support game began to take place with Clarke once again showing us all he can run and stave off tackles. The resident 'CAT' Will Fox yet again proved a handful, driving into the heart of the defence, taking several opposition numbers down in the process. As the pressure told, a Dave Smith & Ausher drive saw the ball released to Griffiths who showed the defender a side step and was over. However, two players got a hold of him as he struggled to get the ball down. Andy Bell came into support the fight and the ruck collapsed, in full view of the spectators, Griffiths landed on his backside, ball on the ground albeit with opposition hands on the ball as well. The referee deemed that it was taken over by the opposition and resulted in a 5 metre attacking scrum.

Without a referee there can be no game, and we should all respect their decisions. Having said that, it is a fact that in total this referee would by the end of the game, have disallowed 6 MMB Try's in the past 3 weeks alone. The second of this match came shortly after when Clarke made an excellent bursting run off of the back of a ruck in front of the uprights. Despite barrelling his burgeoning girth through the tight group of defenders and hitting the ground just to the left of the near post he was deemed to be held up as well?

As Bradley, Smith & Ausher began the tank trot once again down the hill, Maidstone appeared to be trying a new tactic in moving across the pitch. As Fox & Soles got involved, Andy Bell seeing that the opposition was expecting a ball back infield towards the spectators, made a run down the blindside. First on the scene was Clarke, who was agonizingly tied up just 5 metres short of the line. A cheeky off load though saw two defenders facing Steve Jones who made a quick shift of the egg to Mr. Hodges, allowing the FB to sneak through the gap & elegantly fall onto his small frame ball in hand for the Try.

Mention must be made to recent recruit to the sport, James Greengrow who would have scored his debut Try & if he had put the ball down, would have confirmed Try number 3 of the half disallowed. It was broken play just 30 metres from the OG's line. Seal made ground sucking in two defenders and swung the ball inside to Fox. In the confusion of the OG's claiming a knock on, of which had no foundation, Bell passed wide to Tuffrey. Cutting back inside 10 metres and only 18 from the line he was faced with the FB & just behind that, the Winger. A pass back to the wing, had Greengrow in for his debut Try, only to have the whistle sounded for a suspect forward pass which can only be the result of the earlier error in which a forward pass had not been given, was being rectified. With Greengrow now beginning to look at home and a threat on the MMB wing, it will not be too long before he's over the whitewash.

It was a similar move to the 2<sup>nd</sup> that brought about Maidstone's third (allowed) Try. Down the blind side again after more good work from the forwards, allowed Andy Bell to make another break from the back of the ruck. He checked back inside to the left and quickly saw he was through, cutting back even further towards the posts showing his experience and going over the line for a Seal converted Try. 19 - 7 up and beginning to fire on all cylinders.

The kickoff was made by the impressive sprinter at 12, straight into the baying hands of Tuffrey. Usually he would boot the ball a mile down the pitch like a pain in the backside but this time, he decided to run. A switch pass back inside had the ball spill forward and the OG's gobble up his fortune and run it in over the MMB Try line though being forced to place the ball wide by the attentions of Hodges and Jones meant that the conversion was not successful.

An excellent sprinted restart by Seal egged on the the more than vocal Bradley should have given the MMB breathing space but with the sniff of an unlikely draw, OG's came a running. The drift defence in tandem with the wall of the forwards went awry and the OG's were off up Bunker Hill for the 'capture of the flag'. Then, like the Flash, Alex Soles came charging up to smash the opposition 13 and halt the move enough for the MMB to recover a little. However, the ball was quickly recycled and the OG's were off up the hill on the far side once more. As the 11 looked to side step the lone figure of Hodges, the latter just got hold of enough material to slow him down, long enough for Steve Jones to make it across to make the tackle. With reinforcements arriving, Maidstone cleared their

lines down to the halfway line where the ball went out of play. Fortunately for them, it brought the last blast of the whistle from the referee as well. A 19 – 12 victory to justify the already taken league points.

**Next up:** November 24<sup>th</sup>: (A) Sheppey Development XV. Stupple Field ME12 3RT: *R&MK Early Bird League Game*

- No game for Sheppey this week whose last outing was a 35-19 defeat to Aylesford