



## Match Report

### Invicta League

#### Canterbury Pilgrims XV 52 v Mustangs XV 21

Played at Merton Lane, Canterbury, Saturday 7th December, 2013

Illness and three call ups to the 1<sup>st</sup> XV saw the Mustangs travel to Canterbury to take on the league leaders with a much changed team featuring season debuts for front row Martin Maytum, 2<sup>nd</sup> Row Matt Cooper and Will Fox along with new Aussie half-back recruit Michael Messina. However, as a demonstration of the depth that the senior squad is now beginning to generate, these players slotted into the line-up with no problem and were determined to make a statement for future inclusion.

Canterbury's Pilgrims played last season in the regional Rugby Tech Shield (now Zoo Shield) competition and only returned to the Invicta Leagues to ensure regular rugby, due to the frequency of clubs withdrawing from fixtures at short notice.

The hosts started much the brighter, largely because the Mustangs made the mistake of paying them too much respect, the Pilgrims demonstrated how dangerous they could be with the ball in hand, especially on the counter-attack as they found gaps in the visitors defence.

Whilst it would seem that the first half was all Canterbury as they posted 52 unanswered points by the interval, this was by no means the case, the Mustangs had their fair share of possession but were unable to find the cutting edge to pierce the home defence.

Strong words by coach Richard Weston at the interval, combined with some positional changes and the Mustangs were a different side in the second half as they took the game to their hosts. Canterbury were very much on the back foot as they were forced to defend wave after wave of Maidstone pressure, applied by both the forwards and the backs.

Frequent penalties conceded by the Pilgrims gave the visitors the opportunity to gain field position, a line-out close to the Canterbury line created an opportunity for the Mustangs to open their account as Alex Hadi was the beneficiary and crashed over for the Mustangs first score, with Steve McNamara adding the extras. As the Mustangs were beginning to put together several passages of play the Pilgrims were again on the back foot, with former Canterbury player Robbie Grieve making the incisive run to beat three defenders to touchdown in the corner, McNamara again added the extras. Whilst a win was now out of reach it was the Mustangs who had the self-belief with McNamara crossing for the Mustangs third try and converting his own score to see the final whistle with a 52-21 score line.

Another learning experience for the Mustangs, with the second half far more reflective of what they are capable of producing. The key messages were that they should not be overawed by the apparent status of supposedly stronger sides and pay them too much respect, the combination of their own ability and self-belief will ensure that they are competitive.