

MMB 15 Lordswood 17

Sadly, despite this being a good, competitive battle, as evidenced by the close scoreline, this game will also be remembered for all the wrong reasons. Lordswood had enough talent in their ranks to play the game fair and square and most of their number did exactly that (their tall number 13, confusingly playing in the scrum, was man of the match and did a lot of damage to the Maidstone defence through direct running and hard, but totally fair and committed contact). However, it was shocking that the only yellow card of the game went to Barney Carpenter, who had a storming game again for the other 70 minutes, midway through the second half for an over-committed late challenge, when a small number of Lordswood players were persistently punchy, mouthy and exhibited behaviour more associated with football hooliganism than the game of rugby. In a sometimes rather nasty game, the Lordswood number 10 (a player who showed himself to be more than capable of making an impact with running and ball-carrying and was one of the stronger players on the pitch) must receive a special mention for his cowardly, deliberate and close to criminal assault on Jason Hudson. Yes, Hudson had been pestering him on the back of the maul but, with Hudson on the floor and the referee focussed on the maul still going on, to hold Hudson down and knee him hard in the face was utterly unacceptable and would have received the lengthy ban it deserved at a higher level. Rugby is a tough game and MMB accept that, of course, but this was cynical, dangerous, stupid and has no place in sport at any level, let alone in social rugby.

Having got the necessary rant out of the way, I must stress again that Lordswood had a lot of talent and the majority of their team did their damage with strong attacking play, rather than resorting to assault. Apart from the fact that Maidstone should have been playing against 13 men for much of the second half, Lordswood were worthy of their narrow victory and achieved it with one man down for the second half through injury.

An early Lordswood move saw the Maidstone defence battered down and conceding an unconverted try, despite valiant last ditch efforts. As has been increasingly the case recently, MMB fought back fiercely and with determination. A returning guest, Will Fox, made ground through the Lordswood defence, sending big players sprawling; he slipped a good ball to scrum half Gillies who timed the pass perfectly to allow Luke Turner to round the last defender and touch down in the corner to level the scores.

Lordswood moved the ball well and their pack scrummaged, rucked and mauled very strongly, shifting the Maidstone defenders onto the back foot. Their second, converted try came in the second half and was the result of some persistent and heavy pressure from the forwards in the Maidstone half, finished off by some fine running in the backs. Again, however, Maidstone were quick to reply, as Simon Seal set off on one of his trademarked jinking, twisting, elegant runs, covering the ground from close to the halfway line to the Lordswood line without a defender getting their hands on him. He converted the try to put Maidstone back in the hunt. Not long later, Seal was again the centre of attention, as he received the ball in the middle of the field just outside the 22 and did something quite unheard of in MMB's history: he chipped a neat, precise drop goal to put MMB in front.

However, despite several excellent moves that came within inches of breaking through the last line of Lordswood defence from the likes of Will Fox, Nathan?, Ben Hughes, Mike Gillies, James Greengrow and Ace Knight, Maidstone could not finish the game off and lost their discipline a little

to give away a series of cheap penalties. They paid the price for this, when Lordswood went over once more in the corner, their scrum turning the screw repeatedly until a determined defence was finally overwhelmed.

This week's Maidstone man of the match has to be Luke Turner, who not only got a deserved try, but also put in tackle after tackle when Lordswood threatened the Maidstone line; once again, he did not allow his comparatively small stature to hold him back and showed total commitment to smash the opposition.

In all honesty, Maidstone could and should have won this game and it was lost because the Maidstone players allowed themselves to lose their discipline and give away too many penalties. Yes, this was often in response to provocation, but the Maidstone players should be experienced enough not to rise to this. However, apart from this, Maidstone Barbarians continue to show some good form and are playing impressively as a unit (the pods in the forwards worked on so much by coach Frost are functioning smoothly and there are supporting runners available in positions where they never used to be...).

Next week sees the Barbarians off to Sheffield, where they went on their first tour all those years ago. It will be a particularly important and poignant tour, because of the tragic loss of former captain and battler for the Barbarians, Trevor Bradley: it is to be hoped that the performances and attitudes on the tour will be a worthy memorial to that great Barbarian.