

Thanet Wanderers IVs 24 MMB 10

After a frustrating week last week, when a very beatable Hastings side opted out of the game at the last minute, leaving Maidstone without a match, the barbarians found themselves facing a last minute change of plan again; this time, due to rearranged fixtures elsewhere in the club, fifteen hardy and intrepid adventurers found themselves braving the pouring rain, dark skies and mysterious mazy back-roads of east Kent for an unexpected away game at Thanet. All fifteen of them just about made it for the start, with Matt Whatley a welcome sight, arriving at speed, just as the two teams were lined up and ready.

Although the rain stopped soon after kick off, both teams were left with difficult conditions for rugby, grovelling in mud and trying to hold onto a ball that was slippery as a greased piglet. It was a well-drilled, solid Thanet side that coped with the conditions better at first, giving an exhibition of how to use the pod system to roll the ball inexorably forward in wave after wave of attacks from the pack, before delivering to the backs for the final blow. Twice they scored with this effective and impressive method, despite tough tackling and good positions taken behind the rucks by a determined Maidstone defence, which is becoming stronger game by game.

They would have scored a third, if it had not been for an excellent intervention over the line from scrum half, Mike Gillies, somehow wedging both his arms under the ball and keeping it off the ground, when a try looked certain. When Maidstone got their own pod system rolling, it was Gillies who scored at the other end, too: forceful forward momentum from the pack, followed by number eight, Tom Clarke, finding his scrum half, who rounded the last man to touch down in the corner.

The remainder of the first half was fairly evenly matched, though Thanet's backs were just once given too much space and ran in one more try before the half time whistle.

After half time, Maidstone were largely the better team, playing some excellent rugby but, understandably in the conditions, lacking the clinical final pass and spilling the ball on any number of occasions with the opposition try line beckoning. Given the fact that Maidstone spent much of the half camped near the Thanet line, the first Thanet try of the second half came against the run of play; in a rare visit to the Maidstone half, the Thanet pack turned a Maidstone scrum and their fly half was fastest to the ball when it shot out on the wrong side, finding an easy run to the line ahead of him. Maidstone rallied and took the ball back to their favourite spot on the Thanet line for much of the rest of the game, finally breaking through with the last play of the game, when an alert Gillies took a quick penalty and put a long pass out to the right to find Richard Nunn (in an increasingly rare and exceptionally welcome appearance) at pace and, as Maidstone know and several helpless Thanet tacklers were about to find out, Nunn at pace is pretty unstoppable. So, another loss, but an excellent performance: special mention goes to winger Luke Cox, who battled against a painful injury and still managed to inflict real damage on the Thanet defence; man of the match by a distance, though, playing at flanker and justifying the switch from second row with some stunning alert tackling, rucking, support play and line out jumping, was Barney Carpenter, who put in a shift that was truly worthy of the proud MMB shirt.