

Travelling Vets scramble over the finish line claiming hard fought win.

Venturing forth on a light Saturday afternoon into the bowels of historical West Sussex the craggy ensemble of veterans brave a white knuckle convoy of ragtag vehicles trundling the well-worn paths along the M23 to the cauldron that is ...Crawley Rugby club. Nestling between the sprawling town and the south-east's busiest airport hub the tranquil club entrance alongside the bowling green and comedy club advertisement yielded little sign of the task awaiting our merry crew of travellers.

The late arrival of the Coomber father and son heighten tension at the start with the announcement of Keith Coomber as first half referee. From the kick off all was well with Maidstone starting brightly with some promising opening phases from the forwards and early movement from the backline. A couple of kicks down field and the pack provided some opening dominance in the lineouts with a gazelle-like Paul Massey leaping (with some measure of help!) to retrieve an almost straight lineout ball that was fed with true Irish grace by Mick Walker to the backline runners and young George Coomber almost through with a long run down the touchline. The signs were good and with rejuvenated confidence the travellers set-up camp inside the Crawley 22 only to come away empty handed when the home team finally cleared and started to apply some home grown pressure of their own. Knock on from Maidstone and a Crawley scrum just outside the Maidstone 22 fed the ball quickly to the backs and a missed tackle from Costello against some strong running opened up the scoring for the home team with a converted try beneath the posts.

Undaunted Maidstone took the game straight back to Crawley with some more lineout domination and a return visit to the Crawley 22. Two more phases from the pack and the ball was fed out wide with a run and a pass by Costello (yes you heard it here first! ... he passed for first time this season although some say it was in fear inspired) to a rampant Eugene Moore screaming down the line and nimbly side stepping the winger to open up Maidstone's account in the corner. Restart and the sprightly vets, washing away the years were back at it again with some strong back running feeding the ball wide for Eugene Moore to take his tally to two tries for the day leaving it 10-7 at the break with all to play for.

Desperate measures were needed from the home side as they tried to ply our buoyant team with traditional port at the interval and indeed it was to be a game of two proverbial halves (the 1st and the 2nd!). A positive start to the second half as fly-half Mick Walker (alleged man of the match) broke the line to force a breakthrough and off-load a nicely weighted pass for Costello to fall across the line despite irreverent cries from the veteran pack to run harder and score beneath the post. Ten minutes later a kick from prop Pete Grey resulting in a self-inflicted 50m sprint for the line (the sight of which not seen since the 70's!) only for said Mr Grey's desperate back heel pass on the try line for young George Coomber to secure Maidstone's 4th and final try.

The stage was set for Crawley to strike back as siege lines were drawn on the Maidstone 22 with a pounding bombardment from the home side taking a heavy toll with wrinkles wrapping gruesomely round their ageing faces grinding down their resolve under the onslaught. Was this a game to far? Fatigue setting in fast the home breakthrough finally arrives with a score beneath the posts and the

onslaught continues. Tackle after bruising tackle hammers down the Maidstone defence as another try breaks the line. Two minutes to go and can these aging warriors last out? Another kick off and the final whistle blows. 20-17 to Maidstone. Victory through grit and determination on the edge of the abyss. Self-congratulations and mutual back slapping as the first beers are poured in the dressing room, rolling back the years they are young once again revelling in the foggy clouded view of their youth.