

1st March 2014

BARBARIANS FELL THE MIGHTY OAKS

MMBarbarians 31 [Tries: Gillies, Whatley, Greengrow, Lawrenson, Frost; Con: Seal (3)]
SEVENOAKS 4/Vets 7

Having witnessed the MFC Vets lose 28 points in 60 minutes of play against the “Oaks” over 45’s the previous week, the MMB were concerned to see only half of that team turn up with some younger but equally experienced members of their 4th XV.

However, a storming performance from a fired up Maidstone side saw some demons which have hung around since last April, exorcised with a first win of the season, at long last. A lengthy warm up session, led by Colin “what’s the point of me talking if you’re going to talk over the top of me, Greengrow!” Frost in full-on school-teacher mode, meant the Maidstone minds were clearly focussed on the task in hand, particularly in defence and would not make the early mistakes that cost them last week’s game against the Canterbury 3rd XV backline.

In fact, in a reversal of the usual scenario, it was the Barbarians who brought the early energy, quickly putting seven points on the board thanks to persistent pressure from the pack and a breakthrough from Gillies at close range, after the ball had been taken in and recycled quickly several times. There followed a lengthy period in which Maidstone’s defensive training was put to the test and held out impressively, though a tough and talented Sevenoaks side were unlucky to be held up on the Barbarian line and to lose the ball forwards on a couple of occasions.

It is to Maidstone’s credit that they capitalised on the Sevenoaks’ missed opportunities to put two more tries over: the first saw a scrummage won against the head by a consistently impressive pack led by the front row of Trev (hooking?), Dan and Matt led to Maidstone’s second score following a No8 pick up by Clarke, to Gillies who switched the inside to Seal who dragged 3 defenders with him to open up a huge gap for prop Matt Whatley somehow to be coming at pace for the offload and to skip delicately away from the last tacklers and touch down almost unopposed. The third saw a neat backs’ move, culminating in centre Mike Lawrenson stepping outside at pace to draw two defenders away from an excellent angled run to the inside channel from winger James Greengrow who was not going to be caught.

Maidstone went into the break with a lead of 19 points, something the team had not experienced in a long time.

However, the second half began with another period of sustained pressure from Sevenoaks and it has to be said that the least they deserved was their converted try, when the strong Maidstone defensive line was finally twisted out of position by a combination of powerful rucking and hard running.

This time, though, the Barbarians were not going to let the game slip away from them and another two tries sealed the game for them.

The most impressive moment of the game, however, came as Sevenoaks’ pressure looked like breaking the Maidstone line again; impressive counter-rucking saw Matt Cooper emerge with a stolen ball to take out several defenders with a mazy run and set Greengrow away again. Although the Sevenoaks’ full back made it across the pitch to cut off Greengrow’s run, the ball was slipped

slickly through the hands of Ace Knight, exchanging passes with fellow centre Mike Lawrenson to leave the reassembling defence stumbling and Lawrenson with the fourth touchdown. The final try came by way of the introduction of Mark Ingram (unknowingly for the final 2 minutes) having replaced the unfathomable Ulsterman for a final flourish in the opposition 22. One line out followed by a scrum won against the head saw a maul develop and somehow Coach Colin appeared with the ball rolling around the fringe with a desperate 1 meter dive over the line to finish the game. Another 3 conversions were taken with gratitude by Simon Seal.

This was a very strong and solid squad performance with everyone from prop to full back putting in a hard and committed stint, but further special mentions should go to wing Luke Cox, for his last ditch tackling and catching under pressure when Sevenoaks were in full-on attack mode; to fly-half Simon Seal (does this man ever not get a mention???) for another rampaging performance, this time against his old team-mates; to second row Barney Carpenter for his tackling (and especially for THAT catch and then looking after a slightly bewildered elderly colleague and making sure he got to hospital afterwards!); to Colin Frost and Ian Ausher for leading inspirationally by example and to a returning Dave “Cornish” Smith for a strong performance and for being from Barnstaple.

Finally, huge thanks should go to the opposition, who sent a team to Maidstone two weeks running (after having beaten the Vets last week) and were the most sporting and social opposition the Barbarians have encountered this season: a really, thoroughly enjoyable and friendly game.

Appropriately, this is beginning to sound like an Oscars acceptance speech, so roll on the tears of joy and rounds of applause for a deserved win at last.

Next week.....

URFC President’s Invitational Match – Sunday 9th March @ 12.30pm

Uckfield 3/Vets v MMBarbarians