

Deal & Betteshanger III 27 Maidstone V 26

The first of many away-days to the east coast left Maidstone's players rueing some early rustiness in the defensive line and some late, contentious refereeing decisions as a very even and competitive game finished in a one point loss.

With only fifteen fully fit men (and one injured substitute), Maidstone were forced to push players into unfamiliar positions from the start; forwards Alex Soles and Ryan Wheeler as centres, repaid the captain's trust in them with a series of strong ball carries and some fierce tackling throughout the match. However, despite a strong and organised performance, Maidstone found themselves up against a 17 point deficit at half time, thanks to a penalty and two converted tries, both of which owed much to a sleepy defence, undoing the excellent work in attack.

Strong words at half time saw a resurgence from Maidstone in the second half, with a harder edge to the tackling and more focus in the running, with both forward and back divisions supporting the runners well and recycling the ball effectively. The comeback was triggered by winger, James Greengrow: gathering the ball close to the halfway line, he twisted and turned his way through the defensive line, shrugging off tackles to score under the posts. Fly half Simon Seal added the 2 points. This solo try was quickly followed by three more, all of which were the culmination of excellent team play; Colin Frost and captain, Ian Ausher, capped excellent, busy and committed performances in the forward division with a try each and, between the two scores, scrum half Mike Gillies battered his way into the corner for a characteristically powerful score. With Seal on outstanding kicking form, making difficult conversions from acute angles on both sides of the pitch, Maidstone established a strong lead going into the last quarter.

It was Deal's turn to fight back and, despite a much improved defensive display from Maidstone, they broke over the line twice, making ground with their backs before battering the final few yards with their forward division. With only minutes remaining, Maidstone was a single point down.

The Maidstone team regained possession from the kick off and surging runs left the Deal defence with no choice but to give away a penalty. With no time left on the clock, Seal had the chance to win the game from a very challenging position on the halfway line and close to the touchline; his kick fell agonisingly short, then rolled across the dead ball line to leave Deal celebrating the narrowest of victories over a brave and committed Barbarians team.