



Mustang , 2nd XV 26

Played at The Mote, Maidstone, Saturday 20th September, 2014

The fixture between these two sides at the tail end of last season was a very tight encounter and this Invicta League match played on a near perfect day for running rugby was equally close with Maidstone's second string determined to reverse last terms loss and post their first win of the current season.

They say 'if you can play in the centres, you should also be able to cope in the back row' and this theory was tested with Neil Graves starting on the base of the scrum; Dane Smith filled the pivot role at fly-half with a centre partnership of Jason Smith and Gerry Hipkin outside him, whilst new club signing Nick Childs made his club debut at 15.

Sidcup were the first on the scoreboard, using their driving play and rolling maul to good effect, sucking in the home defence to then breaking to exploit a gap to cross for a converted score.

From the restart the Mustangs looked to build phases of play and some good interplay saw them make inroads into the Sidcup 22m, quick thinking at the breakdown saw scrum-half Sam McPherson identify a gap in the visitors defence as he crossed to reduce the deficit to just two points.

Sidcup's obvious strength was their driving maul which the home side were struggling to counter, and it was from another maul that the visitors were able to cross the home line to extend their lead to 5-12 going into the interval.

The half-time team talk focussed on reducing the penalty count and effectively countering the opponents driving maul. With the game plan established the second period commenced with Maidstone applying pressure, it was this pressure that saw McPherson intercept a loose Sidcup pass to scamper in under the posts with Jason Smith adding the extras to level the scores.

Maidstone's defensive line speed which had conceded so many penalties in the first half was now beginning to cause problems for Sidcup, and the pressure it created on the visitors saw some loose passing with Smith able to kick on a loose ball and follow up on his own kick to get the touchdown, subsequently converting his own try and giving the Mustangs the lead for the first time in the match. A brief loss of discipline between the sides saw one from each team in the sin bin for 10 minutes, it was Maidstone who were now looking the more likely to score with Alex Eastwood on the final pass to touchdown in his first outing since picking up an injury on the opening day of the season.

Sidcup were still very much in the game and regrouped to cross for another score to reduce the margin to 24-19, however Maidstone increasing the tempo and Neil Graves, with one of his trademark bullocking runs, got behind the Sidcup defence and quick recycled ball found Jason Smith, who touched down under the posts, converting his own try to take the score to 31-19.

With the clock running down and Sidcup playing catch up rugby running the ball from all over the pitch they went over for a final converted try.

Maidstone: Fox, Mckenzie, Bunyan, Murray, Fiji John, Fitzpatrick, Huppatt, Graves, McPherson, Eastwood, Smith D, Smith J, Hipkin, Ruaux, Childs. **Replacements:** Lamb, Rush, Grabb.