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Miracle with Medway

28 October 2024



For the hosts it was a Saturday of availability Armageddon with an injury list mounting that targeted the front and back rows. Players of yesteryear were called to arms and the 2nd XV was ransacked as such resources would have been familiar to Old Mother Hubbard. Jac Davies was the only debutant as the scrum half pitched is as an open-side flanker. In contrast, Medway who have enjoyed a remarkable consistency in selection, with their sizeable travelling support from Priestfields, looked forward to another showing of “The Usual Suspects”. To add to the task the Kent side topped the table having only lost their opening game of the campaign. Confounding all expectations Sutton & Epsom, for the second match in a row at Rugby Lane, lowered the colours of the league leaders to be victorious by 22-18.

On an overcast but still afternoon that hinted at future rain Freddy Bunting kicked off towards the Cabbage Patch. Understandably confident from their five game winning streak the visitors were immediately on the attack. The eponymous Bullock charged down the paddock from his own 22. Passes were interchanged and a dramatic opening score was denied by the scrambling defence in the S&E 22. Sutton were also lively in the opening exchanges and after five minutes they were awarded a kickable penalty. In a tactical shift of tectonic proportions Freddy Bunting went for goal and put his team 3-0 up.

This minor irritation did not derail the Medway machine as they stormed into action.

The closer to the line they got the harder the hosts tackled. The ball was spun wide and a try looked probable. The visitors employed that popular rugby elision, the long miss pass, that was met by that familiar foe, the interception. Adam Bibby set off for glory eliciting roars of encouragement as he sped past the grandstand. Frantic defenders closed in from all angles and brought him down ten metres short. However, Mr Richardson’s whistle offered the consolation of a second penalty. With ten minutes on the clock Freddy Bunting doubled the advantage to 6-0. Five minutes later, another indiscretion, another penalty and another Bunting three points for 9-0.

The visitors were determined to put the upstart hosts firmly in their place. Almost fifteen minutes of unbroken possession, pressure and territorial dominance ensued. Galvanised by their lead and confident in their defensive unity the Black & White line held fast. A couple of penalties were kicked by Medway for lineouts. Unfortunately, during this passage of play Sutton lost outside centre Finlay Scott to injury and were forced to reshuffle the backs as Adam Bibby went to 13 and Alfie Baker came off the bench to play on the wing. On the half hour the table-toppers were awarded another penalty and decided on going for gold. Harrison Fermor bisected the uprights to trail 3-9.

It was Sutton & Epsom’s turn to attack but a probing Bunting kick keep appeared to nestle harmlessly in the in-goal area under the supervision of John Sipawa. Remarkably the winger knocked on the stationary ball to gift Sutton a 5-metre scrum. The home team ran into a red and amber wall and were turned over and Medway kicked the subsequent penalty to the

The lineout was overthrown and eager Sutton hands gathered the ball. Replacement prop Richard Madadangoma rampaged forward before the backs were released. Slick hands and accurate passing was rewarded as fullback Austin Bell timed his entry into the line to perfection to score. Freddy Bunting converted from the flank and S&E led 16-3.

Medway went in search of a score before the break. A neat lineout move thrown to the front man tried to catch Sutton napping but it came to nought. Soon afterwards there was another penalty to the Black & Whites followed by a stern lecture to Medway lock Peter Cole. The first half ended without any further additions to the scoreboard. The teams turned around with S&E leading 16-3. The makeshift Sutton & Epsom XV were on course for a major upset but everyone at Rugby Lane was expecting more of the same in the second half, relentless Medway pressure. Both sides gathered in a huddle unleashing a primal scream and prepared for battle in the second period.

The opening five minutes were very positive for the Black & Whites, from the secure Glanville take of the restart to winning a scrum against the head. S&E had a free ball and Freddie Bunting attempted a drop goal from distance. It drifted wide but he had the consolation of a long-range penalty to extend the lead. The distance was just beyond his limit

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and Medway touched down under their posts. Soon the visitors were refreshing their XV from the bench and pinning Sutton in their 22 with searching kicks. The vital first score of the half went to the league leaders after a dozen minutes. A determined run down the touchline by John Sipawa burst through the initial tackle and though he was felled by the cover he did wonderfully well to stretch out a telescopic arm as his momentum took the ball over the line. Harrison Fermor's touchline conversion failed but the morale-boosting try made it 16-8. Moments later Medway conceded yet another kickable penalty and Freddy Bunting obliged with three more points for 19-8. The visitors' frustration with the arbiter of truth and justice overflowed and a couple of minutes later a vocal objection to a decision from Mr Richardson led to an additional 10-metre stroll for the defenders. Once more Captain Bunting tested his kicking powers and again it fell short and the game restarted with a 22 drop out. The game entered the final quarter and ominously for the home supporters Medway scored their second try. Excellent support play was rewarded as Harrison Fermor was on hand to score in the corner despite the desperate defence. The 15 was unable to add the extras to his try but his side at 13-19 were within a score with plenty of time left on the clock.
The Black & White defence girded their collective loins and continued to tackle ferociously and win vital turnovers. Additionally the pack were causing Medway problems at the scrum. Another blast of the whistle, another penalty near halfway and another shot at goal for Sutton. These penalties may not have impacted the scoreboard but they frustrated the visitors, took vital time off the clock and made them initiate their attacks from their own

The game was becoming more open and there was no rest from the red and amber attacks and pressure. Sutton were most fortuitous when Tom Lennard was charged down that the loose ball returned to the miscreant kicker. The crowd, living every moment, roared on their sides. As the game entered time added on Freddy Bunting had the opportunity to make it a two-score game with a penalty adjacent to the uprights just outside the 22. He voraciously accepted this tasty offering for 22-13.
Medway now threw the entire contents of the kitchen at the Sutton defences. John Sipawa was greeted by three tacklers and bundled into touch. Jac Davies made a wonderful cover tackle as a line break was extinguished. Every phase repelled ate into the clock until the final play. The Kent side were rewarded with a Max Bullock try in the corner and a bonus point but a delighted S&E side knew that the conversion would be followed by the final whistle. The kick failed and the joyous celebrations began for an outstanding 22-18 victory.
The Sutton defence appeared to have been constructed by Aniketos and Alexiares as the Black & Whites summoned up their inner Heracles. It was a classic example of just what can be achieved with team spirit, defensive resolve and commitment to the cause. Medway never stopped attacking and this was epitomised by winger John Sipawa who bounced off tacklers and swatted away defenders in an effort to breach the Sutton defence. The two teams now get a most welcome week off. The season resumes on 9th November when Sutton & Epsom travel to Dartfordians whilst Medway are on the road again with a trip to Thurrock.
Sutton & Epsom
Bell, Bibby, Scott, Bunting ©, Findlay, Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Jones, Hilton, Glanville, McTaggart, Gerhard, Davies & Hegarty.
Replacements: Madadangoma, Williams & Baker.
Medway
Fermor, Chalmers, Bullock, Clement ©, Sipawa, Wardzynski, Grice, Nickalls, Knight, Campbell, Cole, Stubbington, Jackson, Gibson & Purslow.
Replacements: Hyde J, Hyde N & Reeves.

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