



Maties look rock-solid in Varsity Cup campaign

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THE University of Stellenbosch (Maties) have so far proved to be an unstoppable force through two rounds of the XI edition of the Varsity Cup.

The former three-time champions have won both their outings with ease and sit atop the standings with a maximum 10 points, one more than Wits, who are also unbeaten.

North-West University (NWU-Pukke), the 2016 champions, opened their campaign last weekend and scored big to net a full house of points and move straight up to third.

The remaining six teams have had mixed fortunes.

The University of Cape Town (UCT, fourth) have won one and lost one, so too the University of Johannesburg (UJ, fifth) and 2015 winners Shimlas (sixth), while the University of Pretoria (Tuks, seventh), the defending champions, have lost twice.

Nelson Mandela University (NMU Madibaz) lost their home opener against Ikeys, leaving the Port Elizabeth students second-bottom, while Central University of Technology (CUT), who have yet to taste success on the back of two heavy defeats, are in the relegation seat.

Maties entertain Tuks at the Danie Craven Stadium this evening (7pm kickoff, live on SuperSport) in a repeat of last year's final.

And a change in the result looks a foregone conclusion.

The Maroon Machine are likely to hand the men from the north a hiding.

One cannot see another outcome play out as based on what Tuks have dished up so far.

They look an ordinary lot at best.

Not so Maties, the class of 2018 seem to have it all; the front eight have dominated proceedings and taken no prisoners in the physical engagements and ground skirmishes, while

the back seven can land the killer blow at any time, as shown by right-wing Duncan Saal, who has dotted down five times including a hat-trick last time out against Shimlas.

Now it's all about limiting the error count and making the most of their scoring opportunities that could have been a lot more than 11 tries so far scored.

Tuks will reflect on last year's winning final on home turf as motivation for a repeat, but one doubts whether there's enough firepower in their ranks to trouble a rival in such menacing form.

As for Ikeys, the former two-time champs showed some grit in seeing off the Madibaz on their home field last Monday.

The home side led for most of the contest before paying the price for poor use of the new power play rule.

They called for it close to their try line that saw their captain nominate

two key backs to leave the field for a period of minutes, and then from the scrum platform were pushed backwards by the visitors, who went on to score a try – now worth seven points, that became nine once the conversion went over.

It was a 27-17 first win for the Cape side after going down to Wits in their opener. Pieter Schoonraad caught the eye as a second-half substitute, delivering a telling performance for a try and The Player That Rocks Award, while Karl Martin at fullback gained massive hunks of territory with his booming boot.

Then there was tireless skipper Josh Moon again all over the place (destined for higher honours for sure), not to forget the tight five who impressed again at scrum-time.

Now to build on their result on their home field at the Green Mile.

Other fixtures: CUT v NMMU Madibaz; Shimlas v NWU-Pukke

