



Maties look set to remain unbeaten as struggling Tuks get a new coach

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IT wouldn't be fair to say Maties were twice as good as their fiercest rivals, but that's what the final score suggested when they beat UCT last Monday in round six of the Varsity Cup.

Maties ran out 33-14 victors at a packed Danie Craven Stadium, maintaining their unbeaten record and staying ahead of the chasing pack on the log standings.

The 166th meeting between two former champions of the Cup competition was an action-packed affair that thrilled the 15 000 fans.

The Maties pack produced winning hands in the set-piece

exchanges, their front five imperious in the scrums, shown by the penalty try they earned pushing their opposite numbers back close to their line.

Their backs also played well and scored two of the other three tries, the first touchdown going the way of speedy rightwinger Duncan Saal.

Ikeys were competitive, especially in the second half (they trailed 26-0 at the break), but they made one too many basic mistakes when in possession coupled to dodgy decision-making.

Since the inception of the competition in 2008, Maties have a win ratio of 70%, and against Ikeys, it is even higher.

Three titles were lifted during this period by the Stellenbosch side, but none since the hat-trick of wins completed in 2010, although they have made it to several finals.

But the drought the Maroon Machine has endured for close on a decade may be broken when the tournament concludes with the final later next month.

Ikeys were champions in 2011 and 2014.

They should have been relegated under coach Hanjani Shimange's winless one-year reign in 2016, but with no automatic relegation rule in place for finishing last, got to fight another day – although they did have to play a promotion/re-

legation match against UWC. Christiaan Esterhuizen was appointed as the new coach in 2017 to address the rot that had set in and he has gone on to turn things around to a point where Ikeys are now a foe to be reckoned with, as this season's 50% win return suggests.

His charges have won three and lost three, good enough for fifth place on the nine-team team table and in touching distance of a play-off spot.

Ikeys have a bye in round seven, leaving Maties to do the business.

And it should be win number six for coach Hawies Fourie and his talented lot, with little resistance expected from their Port Elizabeth

opponents NMMU Madibaz, despite them having home field advantage.

The Madibaz have in past campaigns delivered some telling performances against the bigger teams, but this time have found the going tough, as was again evident in the previous round when defeated 69-8 at UJ.

They are winless after five outings, which sees them second last on the log and with the same playing record of basement dwellers and defending champions Tuks, who this week fired their coach.

David Manuel is demoted to assistant coach to incoming Nollis Marais, who has guided the team previously to two of their three

titles.

Marias coached at Super Rugby level but a poor run with the Blue Bulls saw him booted out.

Maties should cruise in and collect another five-point haul, which would take their tally to 32 from a possible 35.

Wits, who held the leaders to a 30-30 draw, are chasing hard in second place, four points off the pace, but the Johannesburg side look set for another positive result when they entertain fourth-placed UJ, who have won three of five starts.

Other fixtures (home teams first): CUT v Tuks; Pukke v Shimlas.

