

Maidstone 3rd XV 19vs.Medway Development XV 17

League: Invicta 3, Match 2

The Mote, Saturday 29th September. Kick-off 15:00

Following the hard fought victory over Snowdown last week, Maidstone were looking to build on that success against local rivals Medway. Maidstone knew that they would be in for a very difficult match against a young, well drilled Medway Development side that rattled up 47-0, and 55-0 wins against them last season.

Medway came to Maidstone on the back of a 68-5 thrashing of TJ IV's in their opening match of the league campaign, which clearly shows that they still possess a fantastic array of attacking talent. For Maidstone to be successful they were going to have to play smart rugby and control the game from the off.

As both teams took to the field it was plain to see that there were contrasting differences. Where Maidstone had experience and tactical intelligence, Medway had youth and energy. Maidstone's strength lay in the brute force and power of the pack, whilst Medway had speed and stamina in the backline. This made Maidstone's game plan simple, keep the ball tight, dominate the breakdown and stop the supply to the Medway backs.

Receiving the ball from the kick-off and playing down the slope, Maidstone were determined to try and intimidate the physically smaller Medway team. Playing narrow around the fringes also allowed the Maidstone forwards to conserve energy whilst keeping the ball moving up the field. When the ball came to the backs, Maidstone looked to test the defensive resolve of their opponents.

John Hogarth at 10, Mike Laurenson at 12 and Justine Evans at 13 all combined on numerous occasions to beat their opposite numbers with inside steps, switches or quick ball movements. Whilst the back three of James Sullivan – returning after a year out, David Ruaux and Ian Howson looked to test the pace on the wings. Along with some superb tactical kicks integrated into their game, Maidstone spent the majority of the first quarter playing the game in the Medway defensive third. Indeed, it was only for some well organised defence that prevented Maidstone scoring on several occasions. However Maidstone were to get the first touchdown.

From a scrum that Maidstone had won in the midfield near the Medway 10 metre line, Maidstone had lined up to attack down the left. But a quick thinking Hogarth changed the direction of play and took the ball right instead. This seemed to catch the Medway defence off guard and the ball found its way to Ian Howson to skip through a couple of tackles on a driving 35 metre run. Howson would have scored himself except for the covering Medway fullback to make the tackle just short of the line, but a superb layoff from Howson to Wilky following up in support, allowed the big number 8 to power over the line. Mike Laurenson had today's kicking duties and easily slotted over the conversion to give Maidstone a deserved 7-0 lead with twenty minutes played.

After giving up the lead so quickly last week, Maidstone needed to be composed and prevent Medway from getting back into the game. From the resulting re-start Maidstone kept to their game plan and secured the ball in the forwards, preventing any real threat on their own line.

During the next ten minutes though both teams did start to suffer from a little loss of cohesion and this led to a passage of scrappy play. Sadly for Maidstone, it was going to be Medway capitalising on some poor handling that would lead to their opening try. From a Maidstone knock-on in midfield,

the ball was collected by Medway and allowed them to break through the covering defence. Some good interplay between the Medway players created space for the centre to run the ball in from twenty metres. The score was now tied: 7-7.

Maidstone had now started to tire and this allowed Medway more space and time to move the ball quickly and attack through their back line. However the Maidstone forwards were still determined to put as much pressure on the opposition as possible and strong running and big tackles from Gary Whitehead, Mike Hill and Edd Adams meant that the Medway 9 and 10 had to always be ready to take a big hit.

Unfortunately the speed and stamina of the Medway backs meant that they were able to up the game's tempo and keep Maidstone on the back foot. Pushing Maidstone deeper into their own half, the ball was moved from the forwards to backs and simple passing kept the ball moving along the line for Medway to beat the cover on the outside for a touchdown in the corner. The conversion missed, but for the second week running, Maidstone had given up the lead and were trailing by 5.

With around five minutes left in the first half, Maidstone dug deep and looked to finish strongly. Sticking to their game plan, they tried to pin back Medway as they had done so successfully in the opening quarter. On the left side on the field, Maidstone won a lineout eight metres from the Medway line and elected to catch and drive. Maidstone walked the ball right up to the whitewash, only for the referee to judge a knock-on before the ball was placed down.

Medway won the resulting scrum, but a poor clearing kick was fielded in the centre of the pitch by Howson who ran the ball back at the defence. In the tackle Medway were penalised for an infringement, and with no time for the lineout, Maidstone were forced to take a shot at goal from thirty metres out. With the difficult kick fading to the right of the posts, the ball was put into touch by Medway and the halftime score was: Maidstone 7, Medway 12.

Maidstone started the second half with conviction and were pushing hard to address the deficit. They continued to dominate in the scrum, pushing Medway off the ball time and time again. Medway had no answer for Maidstone's sheer physical presence, and the half time break brought a second wind into Maidstone's game. Powerful running from Mayhem, Mickael Majcher and Gary Whitehead were at times, knocking back two or three Medway players.

Maidstone's physical dominance started to tell as the Medway players started to stand off and allow Maidstone to run further with the ball. This was to be Medway's downfall. Following a series of fringe plays and forward 'pick and go' moves, the ball was passed to Mickael Majcher running full steam at the inside shoulders of the Medway defence. Mickael easily brushed aside the incoming tackles to power his way over the line. With half an hour left to play, the score was again tied: 12-12.

The game then became more open as Maidstone began to tire and Medway seemed to try overcomplicated moves with the ball in hand. With concentration levels dropping for both teams, the next ten to fifteen minutes were quite scrappy before a Medway kick deep into the Maidstone 22 crossed the line and was touched down for the drop-out.

However a mistake at the drop-out saw the ball go directly into touch without crossing Maidstone's 22 metre line. Medway, realising that they had no answer in the scrum took the throw in. Winning the lineout, they shipped the ball quickly to the backs. The ball was moved back and forth along the line to create space and wrong foot the Maidstone defence. After breaking through on the inside shoulder it was a simple run to the line for Medway's third try. A missed conversion and the score

was now 12-17.

With around ten minutes of the game left, Maidstone would have to show the determination and desire of the previous week to turn this game around. Once again, being behind seemed to spark some renewed vigour in Maidstone's game.

The forwards continued to dominate and from a ruck on the Medway 10 metre line, Maidstone's backs broke down the left flank. With a superb pass finding James Sullivan in space, he broke free down the wing. As Medway's defence struggled to get organised, Sully rounded his opposite winger only for the fullback to use the touchline as cover with the try line only a couple of metres away.

Maidstone pinned Medway right back against their line but they just couldn't manage to cross. With practically no time left, Maidstone were awarded a penalty on the Medway 5 metre line. With three points not enough, Maidstone took the scrum. With a pick up at the back of the scrum, Maidstone pilled everything forward but still couldn't cross. Then the worst outcome for Maidstone as the ball was knocked forward and Medway hacked the ball clear. But to the dismay of all the Medway fans watching from the side-lines, Maidstone had been awarded another penalty for offside at the tackle line.

Playing to their strength Maidstone took the scrum. This time there was no pick up. Instead captain Tuggy instructed the pack to push Medway back over their try line. As with many of the scrums throughout the game, Medway just couldn't contend with Maidstone's power and they collapsed the scum just short of the line. With the referee deciding that the infringement prevented a try, he blew his whistle and the penalty try was awarded to tie the game at 17-17. With no time left in the match, for the second week running Mike Laurenson had the game in his hands, and he confidently kicked the conversion. A fantastic Maidstone victory: 19-17.

This display really showed how Maidstone can play smart rugby. They stuck to a game plan that clearly identified how to contain a well-drilled, younger and fitter side. Although Medway played some excellent rugby, and probably feel aggrieved to leave the Mote with nothing, much of their play was capitalising on Maidstone's mistakes. If Maidstone can eliminate those mistakes from their game, they may well go on to be fighting at the top end of the table come April. Avenging the two heavy defeats from last term, Maidstone can boast a 100% record.

To add to Maidstone's comeback performance, special mention should go to Simon Wright for his personal comeback after two years out of the game, putting in a good shift and solid display.

This week's MOTM performance goes to Martin Maytum for his work rate and physicality in the rucks and loose. Proving that a summer in the gym was worthwhile.

Squad:

Richard Gray: Chris Morton: Mark Thurgood: Matt "Dave" Cooper: Mayhem: Mike Hill: Edd Adams: Wilky: Tuggy: Hogy: James "Sully" Sullivan: Mike Laurenson: Justin Evans: David Ruaux: Ian Howson: David Baker: Gary Whitehead: Simon Wright: Mickael Majcher

