

Match Report

Maidstone 8 v Wells 14

by Trevor Langley

RFU Senior Vase, National Semi-Final

Home at The Mote, Saturday 7 April, 2012 Kick Off – 2.00 pm

Before this game started, Maidstone Coach, Andy Foley, posited the game would be won by the team that best overcame their nerves and took their chances. And Maidstone almost fulfilled this prophecy until the class of the Wells' backs finally told, unleashing a move that confounded the Maidstone defence with 5 minutes remaining to secure the 14-8 win in this closely fought encounter.

From the outset, this was a game between the Maidstone forwards, who dominated the tight exchanges, and the Wells backs who looked a well oiled unit, with inside centre Alex Knight, the stand out player. But it was Maidstone that kicked the game into life.



From their kick off, they regained the ball and drove deep into the heart of the Wells defence, before bringing right wing, Matt Iles, into the play, to make a dart down the wing before passing back inside for

Lee Thomson to get the touch-down pass with only two minutes on the clock. Steve McNamara couldn't find the posts, on this occasion, but it was clear that this score had rocked the visitors and their vocal travelling support.

While Maidstone continued to play through their forwards, the visitors saw their route to glory through use of their back line and quickly demonstrated some well constructed moves. Indeed, before ten minutes had passed, Maidstone's defence was stretched to the limit as two try-scoring passes were put to ground by last ditch tackling.

But the Wells pressure eventually told, as Maidstone began to infringe and after two easier penalties were kicked to touch to set up attacking moves, a 45 metre opportunity was taken, by stand-off, Cook, to cut the deficit to two points, just past the quarter hour.





A further penalty opportunity, just on the half hour, put the visitors' noses in front, just when Maidstone were beginning to establish an extended period in the Wells half. A long relieving kick eluded the Maidstone defence, which conceded a penalty on the 22

and Cook had no problems with the conversion.

In added time, Wells had two further penalty opportunities, both of which were missed. So, at half time, Wells, the side with the outstanding backs, had only scored from penalties and Maidstone, the side with the outstanding forwards had scored the only try. But this ensured the second half was set up with all to play for, with 'winner take all' the outcome.

On the restart, once again, Maidstone were quickest out of the blocks. This time it was a penalty on the Wells 22, from wide right, that Steve McNamara slotted to put the home side back in the lead with two minutes gone.

Once again, Wells countered through their three-quarters and managed to play the game in Maidstone's half of the field. But the home defence was solid and never allowed the vital break to be made. A yellow card for Luke Debnam after eight minutes, having stretched the patience of Dutch referee, Gert Visser, to breaking point, compounded Maidstone's problems. But the side dug in and resisted everything thrown at them.

A further penalty misses by Cook, from in front of the posts, in the 22, in the period when Wells had numerical superiority, must have sent shivers down their supporters' collective spines. Maidstone even had the chance to take back the lead, in this same period, but McNamara's attempt hit the left hand post and rebounded back into play, compounding the agony for all the watchers.



It was not until 25 minutes of the half had gone that Wells regained the lead. After a break by stand-off, Cook, had released left wing, Branch, cutting an inside line, Maidstone's stretched defence conceded a penalty in front of the posts and, this time, Cook made no mistake to put the visitors back in front.



With Maidstone beginning to look tired, Wells upped their game and with five minutes left on the clock, Cook made another decisive break to release centre, Knight, with sufficient space to go outside his man and score wide left.

The conversion was missed, so one score separated the sides and with Dave Charlton on at stand-off half, for a last throw of the dice, Maidstone raised themselves for a last hurrah. And it almost came off. With six minutes of time added, it was the home side that were driving for the line, only to be thwarted by an infringement, at the last.

On the balance of play, this was a game that neither side deserved to lose but the extra touch of class outside the pack eventually paid dividends for Wells. It is easy to play a game of what might have been, had Neil Graves and Ollie Newton been available to pose more attacking options for Maidstone, for everyone came out of this encounter with credit.



The game had a few moments of feistiness but, most of the time, a full blooded encounter provided a game to savour and a fine end to an enthralling cup campaign. Wells now go on to Twickenham to the final on May 5 to face Yorkshire club Wath on Dearne who trounced Stourbridge Lions in the other semi-final; and our best wishes go with them.

Team

Ben Williams; Sam Bailey (Josh McKenzie 75 mins); Luke Debnam: Steve Matthews; Hayden Mitchell: Richard Parker (Damian Grab 40 mins); Luke Day (Andy Bacon 79 mins); Lee Thomson: Sean Charlton; Steve McNamara: Matt Iles; Mark Dorman; Jamie Smith; Leo Fedorcio (Dave Charlton 70 mins): Gareth Bramwell (Dan Eastwood 25 mins). Replacements not used: Ally Moss, Martin Maytum (52-58mins)