

## Match Report

**Maidstone 55 v 33 Folkestone**

**by Bob Hayton**

RFU Senior Vase: Regional Semi-Final

Home at The Mote, Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> February, 2012 Kick Off – 2.00pm



Maidstone hosted promotion chasing Folkestone in this cup semi-final fixture having met twice in the league already and with honours shared in matches that had gone with home advantage.

Maidstone had made several changes since last week's outing, with prop Ben Williams and stand-off Steve McNamara making their home debuts., Sam Bailey returned at hooker with Troy Liddell moving to the blindside flank. Ben Williams stepped into the front row with Steve Matthews behind him. Richard Parker returned on the back row alongside Liddell and Lee Thomson. In the back division returning Ben Hollingsworth took the scrum half berth, with Ollie Newton moving to the centre and Jamie Smith in on the wing for the

unavailable Matt Iles. The calming influence of Ollie Rogers returned to the full back position.

The match was played in perfect conditions, and the well-worn cliché of a game of two halves was probably never more apt, as the Maidstone came out of the blocks with real purpose to their game to put together a half that demonstrated great control of the ball and structure of play; Coach



Andy Foley described it as “one of the best 40 minutes of rugby a Maidstone side has played in his time as coach”.



The home side started this match where they left off against Harlow in the last round of the competition, and the visiting Folkestone side were shell-shocked as Maidstone registered their first score within two minutes when Lee Thomson crossed to the right of the posts and Steve McNamara added the extras. McNamara added to his tally shortly after with a penalty to give the home side a 10-point advantage midway through the first quarter; he was on the scoreboard again on fifteen minutes as Maidstone's offloading game saw the ball fed wide to the right and he beat the last defender to touchdown under the post for another seven points. A similar move three minutes later also saw Jamie Smith cross in the corner. Maidstone's fourth try came on 24 minutes as a lineout inside the Folkestone 22m was overthrown with hooker Sam Bailey pouncing on the loose ball to crash over from five metres out, the ever reliable McNamara added the extras. The home side weren't finished yet as straight from the restart Steve Matthews drove the ball into the Folkestone defence and offloaded the ball in the tackle, the final recipient was skipper Hayden Mitchell who gave the home crowd the rare sight of 19 stones of lock forward sprinting in to score from fifty metres, again McNamara added the extra points with an excellent conversion from close to the touchline.

At this point Maidstone were scoring at greater than a point per minute despite the very occasional Folkestone forays into the home side's territory; and it was the repelling of one of their attacks on the half-hour mark that saw Maidstone break away to force a line-out on the Folkestone 5m; the ensuing catch and drive saw prop Ben Williams on his home debut emerge from the pile to register the score with McNamara reliably adding the extras. It was McNamara again who closed out a fine first half as from quick ball supplied by the forwards he sold a dummy inside the Maidstone half to wrong foot the defence and

then beat the last tackle to cross to the left of the posts, the subsequent conversion gave Maidstone a 50-0 half time advantage and really put the match out of Folkestone's reach.



Second half changes by both sides had their effects, as Folkestone, even if only playing for pride started on the front foot and played some great running rugby, whilst the home side looked to have taken their foot 'off the gas' and basic errors crept into their game. The enforced changes meaning that the home side ended up with a back line consisting of

back row forwards and props that did nothing to help keep them keep their defensive shape. There are those that say the slope on the Maidstone pitch is worth a good 25 points and the second half proved that as some poor Maidstone tackling and defensive play saw visiting flanker Krizanek capitalise to cross midway out on the left for Folkestone's first score. Almost from the restart Folkestone were back on the offensive and after a period of pressure the home side looked to have stemmed the danger when an Ollie Rogers kick was charged down with Folkestone scrum half Evans first to the loose ball, Fell added the extras and the deficit was further reduced. Errors in Maidstone's normally reliable defence continued as a chip over the defensive line was initially covered by Rogers but then fumbled in-goal for Folkestone's wing Squires to pounce on for their third score, Fell again added the extras.

Maidstone then started to slow the game down, but basic errors were putting themselves under pressure, this time on 25 minutes replacement Eustace made the intercept to cross for a converted try. Five minutes later Folkestone were again on the scoreboard as Squire broke to touchdown under the posts making the conversion simple for Fell.

With an upset potentially on the cards as a spirited and committed opposition continued to chase the game, Maidstone started to use their heads and kept the ball tight and it was this good forward play that forced Folkestone to infringe, the lineout on the Folkestone 22m from the penalty, saw the reliable Steve Matthews take the catch and the subsequent 20m drive saw Williams ground the ball for his second score of the match; the conversion attempt by Rogers missed narrowly to the right of the posts and the home side had closed the game out.



The 55-33 score line sees Maidstone progress to the London & SE Regional Final on March 17<sup>th</sup> where they travel to Newmarket who overcame Norwich 28-22.

## Team

Ben Williams, Sam Bailey, Luke Debnam, Steve Matthews, Hayden Mitchell (c), Richard Parker, Troy Liddell, Lee Thomson, Ben Hollingsworth, Steve McNamara(Sam Ellis 50), Leo Fedorcio (Gareth Bramwell 40), Neil Graves (Nick Bunyan 65), Ollie Newton, Jamie Smith (James Withers 68), Ollie Rogers