

Maidstone 3rd XV 0 vs. Tonbridge Juddians 4th XV 3

League: Invicta 3, Match 6

The Mote, Saturday 3rd November. Kick-off 14:30

With the memory of last weekend's Ashford game still painfully sore, Maidstone had the opportunity to correct that blip and reinforce the notion that The Mote will remain a fortress this year. At the start of the day Maidstone had slipped to fourth in the table whilst TJs were up to third. Crucially though Maidstone still has a game in hand, so a win here would keep the pressure on Ashford at the top.

After the enforced changes last time out, Maidstone's squad took on the resemblance of the teams that started the campaign with those first four consecutive wins. Furthermore, there was definitely a sense of optimism that Maidstone could overturn a TJs side that had a strong and sizable pack, but seemed to offer little in creativity in their back line.

With the game kicking off, both teams set up their stalls and showed that this would be a war of attrition for the forwards. Maidstone's pack often has a size, strength and weight advantage but here they were up against a side that were on an equal footing in all those departments. This was totally evident in TJs play as rarely did the ball get out past the number 12.

However, for the first time this season Maidstone failed to adapt their game plan. The Maidstone back line clearly had the beating of their opposite numbers, and the smart play would have been to set up the ball in forwards and then ship the ball wide early. To their credit though, TJs forwards were excellent in both attack and defence as well as being able to disrupt Maidstone's play.

With the ball in hand, Maidstone's decision making was generally very good and near the end of the first half Maidstone had two opportunities to open the scoring. The first was a slick move set up by the forwards on the right of the pitch, and then from three passes, the ball had been shipped over to the left wing for what would have been an easy score - except that the referee blew for a very questionable forward pass.

The second was a sweeping move down the right hand side, which had superb interplay between both forwards and backs, which was only scuppered by an uncharacteristic handling error close to the whitewash. Ultimately though neither team offered enough to break the deadlock and the halftime score was 0-0.

The second half followed a similar pattern to the first although TJs exerted slightly more pressure as they attacked down the slope. Maidstone's defensive play was very good, predictably though TJs continuously used their forward's size to try and break through. With Maidstone's defence organised well, the best TJs could muster was from a line out about 10 metres from Maidstone's line. Winning the lineout TJs setup a rolling maul only for the ball to be held up in goal.

As the match developed, it soon became clear that this was going to be a very tight affair. A moment of brilliance or a moment of madness could decide the game. As it turns out, it was neither brilliance nor madness, but a penalty in the final ten minutes right in front of the uprights.

Maidstone were penalised for offside and it was a simple kick for TJs to take the lead. Following the penalty there were a few late exchanges, but TJs managed to hold on for the win. Maidstone's first home loss of the season. The final score: Maidstone 0, Tonbridge Juddians 3.

It could easily be said that as a match, this game never really got going. Maidstone had clear areas of supremacy but failed to capitalise on them. On the other hand TJs stuck to a game plan that suited their style of play, and ultimately they would probably have been more than satisfied with a draw. Going back with a win is probably something they never really expected. Perhaps Maidstone can take a small bit of solace from the losing bonus point.

Despite the disappointment, this game did show a number of positives. Maidstone's all round defensive display was excellent, well organised and effective, whilst the attacking play brought to the fore some excellent running rugby, with starring displays from forwards Ben Hunter and Mike Blacker.

With two defeats on the bounce, next week's game in hand trip to Canterbury now takes on extra significance. If Maidstone expects to be challenging for honours come the end of the season, a return to winning ways is paramount.

This week's MOTM performance goes to Sam Mann. Selected by Vice-Captain Mike Laurenson, Sam returns to the game at number 9 after eighteen months out with injury. With a superb display at scrum half, Sam harassed his opposite number all game and showed his attacking and creative abilities throughout the match.

Squad

Ross Laing: Ollie Coomber: Chris Morton: Martin Maytum: Simon Wright: Mike Oakley: Mike Blacker: Ben Hunter: Chris Tomlin: Edd Adams: Sam Mann: John Hogarth: Andy Smith: Jason Smith: Mike Laurenson: Justin Evans: David Ruaux: Ian Howson