



Match Report

London & SE Division 1 (South)

Brighton RFC 21 - Maidstone FC 15

Played at Brighton Saturday 1st April, 2017

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Another hard fought, close battle; another defeat, away, to fast improving Brighton, by 20-15. In the equivalent game at the Mote, Maidstone came away the winners by a single point margin and with a recent win against Tunbridge Wells to bolster confidence, Brighton clearly indicated they would be a difficult side to beat on their own patch. And so it proved.

Once again, Maidstone's pack laid down a platform for the side but, again, the three-quarters were unable to take advantage, lacking sufficient guile and cutting edge to finish things off. And yet, Maidstone provided the best move of the match for their second try, to score in the corner, after a flowing move that stretched the Brighton defence to the limit.

Further credible evidence of capability came at the very end of the game, when all seemed lost, to conjure a spell of free flowing rugby that matched anything provided by the hosts and showed what might have been.

The pack was virtually unchanged from last week with Lewis Stimpson coming in at open side and Ben Brill moving to No. 8. Matt Iles' move into the centre was forced by the paucity of resources available for selection and reflected his strong team ethic, moving away from the back row, which he has made his own this year, to plug a hole.

Other changes in the back line saw Rory Beech move back to fly half and Euan Caborn to full back, with Shaun Woolford coming back on the right wing, with Alex Clarke dropping to the bench. These forced changes impacted the back line, with the search for fluidity and understanding suffering for the early part of the game. But despite the impediments, the defence against a lively Brighton back line was strong, let down by only a single lapse of concentration for a Brighton try in the second half.

Maidstone started in a lively fashion, taking advantage of an early penalty on half way, to set up a catch and drive. While the Brighton defence held, a second penalty in the Brighton 22 gave an early opportunity for Maidstone to get on the board.

Surprisingly, Euan Caborn missed what, for him, should have been a 'gimme' and this was punished by the hosts, shortly thereafter, when from a charged down clearance kick in the Maidstone 22, the ball was claimed by Brighton to feed centre, Fogarty, to score by the posts, allowing fly half, Evans, a simple conversion and a seven point lead, with ten minutes on the clock.

Maidstone had another attempt at the catch and drive routine to get on the scoreboard but the Brighton defence thwarted them, once again, until just before the end of the quarter, Caborn had the chance to atone for his earlier penalty miss, from almost the same spot. This time he was on target.

But a knock on from the restart and an offside, incurred to secure the loose ball, gave



Brighton the chance to restore their seven point advantage, and Evans duly obliged from a wide angle on the left.

Brighton seemed to gain confidence from this exchange and looked to build on their lead. But a missed penalty chance on the half hour and a number of handling errors, on their own part, continued to frustrate them, allowing Maidstone to reach the half way stage without incurring any further scores.

With Danny Baker coming off the bench at the restart, Maidstone's pack went into dynamic mode and pushed Brighton off the ball at the first put in, giving the hosts something different to think about. With a higher tempo of play, Maidstone began to stretch the Brighton defence, resulting in a yellow card for second row, Emerson, following a series of penalties in their own 22.

And with the hosts playing with fourteen men, Maidstone eventually found a way round the Brighton defence, on the quarter hour, with a flowing cross-field move that saw Pankhurst, on the wing, scoring in the corner. With only a two point deficit, there was, seemingly, all to play for.

But it was the hosts that struck the next blow. Strong running by the Brighton back line looked likely to pierce the Maidstone defence, but it was a quick tap penalty that provided the next score, with scrum half, Herbe, thinking quickly and darting over in the corner to extend the Brighton lead to 15-8.

With the clock running down and Evans using the heightening wind to claim field position, Maidstone came under increasing pressure as the forty minute mark approached. From one such foray into Maidstone's 22, the line was eventually pierced by Emerson, set up by a slick pass from Fogarty, to extend Brighton's lead to 20-8.

But Maidstone refused to lie down and with four minutes of added time on the clock, hit back with a Nathan Simpson try, ably converted by Caborn, from the left touchline, to reduce the deficit to five points. Suddenly, the visitors found a new lease of life and played out time on the front foot, showing pace and invention to attack the heart of the Brighton defence.

Unfortunately, it was too little, too late and Brighton secured their win and, probably, their future in this league for next season.

For Maidstone, this was another tale of 'what might have been'. Once again, the pack provided the back bone for a fine team effort, but a makeshift three-quarter line struggled to hammer home the advantage of the possession they were given. Fixing this problem will, undoubtedly, be on the agenda, with next season, in mind.

Maidstone Ben Williams; Josh Pankhurst; Nathan Simpson: Adam Knight; Ben Massey: Ben Knight; Lewis Stimpson; Ben Brill: Lucian Morosan; Rory Beech: Matt Moore; Filip Perica; Matt Iles; Shaun Woolford: Euan Caborn

Replacements: Danny Baker; Alex Clarke; Jack Johnson (All used)

