



Match Report



London & SE Division 1 (South)

Maidstone FC 14 – Tunbridge Wells RFC 15

Played at The Mote, Saturday 3 September, 2016



The first game of a new season is always one greeted with excitement and trepidation. Will the new recruits measure up; what brand of rugby will they play; can they get a first win on the board to give themselves a decent launchpad? Many of the questions delivered only partial answers but this first competitive run out showed there is a lot more to come from the side.

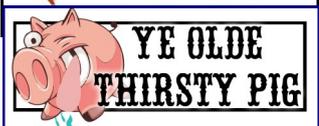
Maidstone were pipped in this opener, 15-14, by local rivals, Tunbridge Wells, who showed, in the first half, some fast open running. But as the game progressed, Maidstone came into the game and could have won had their kicking game and discipline been sharper. On balance, the visitors just about deserved their win but, the further the game progressed, the more they looked under pressure and, at the death, were hanging on for their lives.

Maidstone welcomed four new faces into the starting fifteen. Brendan Trudgen, Leon Olsson and Matt Moore, all from the antipodes, in the backs, while Ben Knight moved over from Ashford to join his brother Adam, in the pack. The front five had a familiar look from last season and this was reflected in the scrummaging, where they had the upper hand for most of the afternoon.

With a well grassed pitch, no breeze and a perfect temperature, the game was set up for a scintillating game of rugby. Unfortunately, this was far too early in the season for either side to deliver and both coaching teams walked away from this game with a list of items to work on.



Tunbridge Wells started the brightest and dominated the first quarter, stretching the Maidstone defence at every opportunity. But the first chance went to Maidstone with a



penalty on five minutes. Unfortunately, new boy, Trudgen pushed the opportunity to the left of the posts and it was Wells that went ahead shortly thereafter, with right wing and skipper, Champion, getting the touchdown out wide after a catch and drive had been held by Maidstone on the left. Fly half, Reynolds added the conversion to give the visitors a well-deserved, seven

point lead as the quarter hour approached.

From the restart, Maidstone made their lives harder when Ben Massey was yellow carded for interfering with a player jumping for the ball. This allowed the visitors a greater advantage for their slick attacks but Maidstone dug in and defended stoutly, repelling everything thrown at them.

As the end of the half approached, so Maidstone came into the game, playing more in the Wells half and with increasing cohesion. A line out delivered quick ball to Craig Webb in the centre and the visitor's defence gave away a penalty, trying to stop him, thirty metres out, in front of the posts. Unfortunately, this opportunity was spurned, and the half came to a close without further change to the score.



The second half started with Maidstone mounting a series of attacks that took them down into the visitor's 22. A five metre scrum led to a series of Maidstone attempts to get to the line but the visitors' defence held firm and a relieving penalty eventually allowed them to quell the Maidstone fire.



Just past the quarter hour, with Maidstone still knocking on the door, a second yellow card, this time to No 8, Josh Pankhurst, gave the advantage back to Tunbridge Wells and they took full advantage.

Taking the play down to the Maidstone 22, the home side gave away a penalty that

Reynolds converted to extend the Wells lead to ten points and, just before Pankhurst returned to the field, Wells added a further try by Champion, in the right corner, this time after a chip and chase, giving a fifteen point lead.

With just over ten minutes left on the clock and full complement restored, Maidstone suddenly found their feet as the visitors noticeably tired. A superb break by Pankhurst, just outside his own 22, took play deep into the Wells half. Full back Trudgen was on hand to take the inside pass to defeat the cover and



touch down under the posts, making his conversion a formality.

The visitors were now stretched to the limit and a yellow card for killing the ball in their own 22, saw Wells reduced to fourteen men. The next attack saw Trudgen once again making the line and then saving time by converting with a drop goal, with injury time approaching.

Maidstone thought they had won when another attack split the Wells defence and winger Moore emerged to cross the line but the last pass was adjudged forward. Another yellow card, which

saw a second member of the Wells front row leave the field, moved the game to uncontested scrums, but this failed to alter the final balance and Wells hung on to claim the points.

The result just about reflected the balance of the game, with the visitors looking the more cohesive, especially in the first half, while Maidstone came to life fully only in the second. However, their defence looked solid throughout and there was enough shown in the last quarter to indicate there is plenty to come from the back line, as they play more together, while general fitness looks good.

With Ben Brill available next week along with Ralph Cooke, the scrum will get further firepower, while Alex Eastwood and Tom Waring should also be available to boost the back line. It's clear there is far more to come from this side and, while the bonus point from this game was a consolation of sorts, the omens look positive for some solid wins in the future.

Maidstone Ben Williams; Will Massey; Jack O'Connell; Adam Knight; Ben Massey; Ben Knight; Jack Lamb; Josh Pankhurst; Lucian Morosan; Rory Beech; Alex Clark; Craig Webb; Leon Olsson; Matthew Moore; Brendan Trudgen
Replacements: Danny Baker; Lewis Stimpson; Josh Smith (All used)

