



Match Report



London & SE Division 1 (South)

Maidstone FC 19 – Gravesend RFC 30

Played at The Mote, Saturday 8 October, 2016

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Maidstone started this game at high tempo, with lots of commitment, but failed to maintain the required level of intensity against an efficient and savvy Gravesend side. The 30-19 scoreline, to the visitors, reflected the relative strengths of the two sides, highlighting the fact that Maidstone have much to work on if they are to turn round their three game losing streak.

The imposition of three yellow cards on Maidstone, in a sequence of defensive lineouts and scrums, on their own line, did not help their cause but by this stage, deep into the last quarter, the game was lost. But, perversely, it encouraged a resurgence from Maidstone, as they withstood all Gravesend's efforts to add to their lead, in a combined act of defiance.

Ben Williams returned to the front row after missing the last two games with a hamstring injury, but in the continuing absence of Will Massey, Nathan Simpson retained the hooker role, with Danny Baker making up the starting front row. Lucian Morosan returned to scrum half, after last week's absence, with Matt Moore reverting to the right wing, in the absence of Alex Eastwood and Tom Waring.

Maidstone started the game full of attacking intent and immediately put Gravesend on the back foot. Two penalties, in quick succession, for not rolling away after a tackle, gave Maidstone the chance to get early points on the board but Ross Cooke's attempts faded either side of the posts. With the end of the first quarter approaching, Gravesend began to get their own game together and, prompted by fly half, Dorton, began to stretch the Maidstone defence.



A strong run by left wing, Rayner, was eventually stopped in front of the Maidstone posts, but with the defence transgressing, Dorton was presented with a simple penalty



chance, which he duly took, to put the visitors in front.

Ten minutes later, the left wing channel again proved a happy hunting ground for Gravesend. With a switch of play in centre field, Rayner was released to outstrip the Maidstone defence and provide Dorton with a simple conversion to stretch the visitor's

lead to ten points.

In looking to consolidate their superiority after the restart, Gravesend then provided Maidstone a way back into the game. A long pass to the left wing was intercepted by Matt Moore and he outstripped the cover to touch down under the posts, thereby reducing the deficit to three points.

But Gravesend were not to be denied. After a long-range penalty attempt dropped under the posts, the visitor's back line once more showed their cutting edge to score a second converted try. This time it was inside centre, Barbour that made the break to set up flanker, Marshall, with Dorton again adding the conversion to give Gravesend a 17-7 half time lead.



While it was clear that Maidstone had work to do to get back into the game, conceding a penalty from the restart did not help the cause. But, once again, Gravesend's over ambition in attack helped the Maidstone cause. Another floated pass was intercepted by Matt Moore, on his own 22, and he had the legs to outpace the cover, once again touching down under the posts. Cooke's conversion reduced the deficit to three points with only five minutes on the clock.



This inspired Maidstone and they immediately built pressure on the visitor's line. A penalty deep in the visitor's 22 was punted to touch to set up a catch and drive. While the line out was lost, the resulting clearance to touch, on the left, was taken quickly by Leon Olson to start a move across the field, involving Cooke and Rory Beech, setting up Olson to score in the right corner and establish a two point Maidstone lead, with less than ten minutes played.

Thoughts of a revival came to mind, but Gravesend had other ideas. After the Maidstone defence had stopped an attack in mid-



field, another switch of play saw full back, Betts, make a break through the centre and release winger Rayner, who beat the cover to touch down. The conversion by Dorton put the game back in Gravesend's grasp, opening a five point margin, on the quarter hour.



Two more Dorton penalties, before the half hour, stretched the visitor's lead to eleven points as Maidstone continued to incur the referee's wrath by not rolling away after the tackle. But in a five minute passage, following the second penalty, Maidstone incurred

three yellow cards as they lost Ben Massey, Ben Knight and Ben Brill for infringements in the red zone, firstly at the line out and then at successive scrums on their own five-metre line.

There was sufficient time for two of the infringers to get back on to the field but the fact that Maidstone resisted all of Gravesend's efforts to score, especially when down to twelve players, says much about the spirit within the side.

But it is clear that the coaching team has some thinking to do. While the pack looks solid in the tight and the defence is generally good, the attack seems to lack a cutting edge to convert field position into points. In addition, the inability to take advantage of early penalty opportunities, to get points on the board, is another point of weakness at the moment.

As we know, there are no easy games in this league and Maidstone will need to improve if they are challenge for a top half spot, this year.

Maidstone Ben Williams; Nathan Simpson; Danny Baker: Adam Knight: Ben Massey; Ben Knight; Josh Pankhurst; Ben Brill: Lucian Morosan; Brendan Trudgen: Matt Moore; Craig Webb; Rory Beech: Leon Olson; Ross Cooke
Replacements: Jack Lamb; Jack O'Connell; Ollie Newton (All used)

