



Match Report

London & SE Division 1 (South)

Gosport & Fareham RFC 0 - Maidstone FC 33

Played at Gosport, Saturday 10th December, 2016

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Maidstone sewed up this game in a twenty minute spell, in which they scored five tries, to come away from bottom of the table, Gosport and Fareham, with a comfortable 33-0 win. If this period of attacking rugby had occurred in the first half, the margin of victory would have been even larger. By leaving it to the last period of the second half, they allowed Gosport to remain in the game with hopes of a victory.

With five changes to the team that narrowly overcame Brighton last week, four of them in the pack, there were reasons to explain the slow start. Also, there were the positives of a solid defence that withstood all that the hosts could throw at them, along with the try bonus point to add to the four points for the win. But it was clear that for much of this game, Maidstone played well below their potential and are missing a vital spark at the moment.

A radical reshuffle of the pack at the start of the second half proved to be the key to the improved display that confirmed the win. In addition, the late introduction of Felipe Perica into the back row highlighted a new talent for the side, whose pace and power added a number of breaks, one a try-scoring effort off the base of the scrum that helped secure the bonus point.

Gosport were gifted a kickable penalty from the kick off and a second on the Maidstone 22 a few minutes later. But the strong wind blowing straight down the pitch proved too difficult for full back Lewis to take advantage.

The wind also interfered with throwing into the line out and proved a difficult area for Maidstone all afternoon. On the other hand, Maidstone were dominant in the scrum throughout, with the Gosport eight finding it very difficult to withstand the visitor's push.

With Ross Cooke receiving a yellow card for a high tackle after ten minutes, Maidstone had further early problems to contend with and it was not until he returned to the pitch that they finally got the scoreboard moving. A break from their own half established field position, deep in the Gosport half, and a penalty for not rolling away gave Caborn a straightforward opportunity to put Maidstone in front.

A second penalty, five minutes later, with Gosport one man down, yellow carded for persistent offences, doubled Maidstone's lead. And this is how it remained up to half time. The referee spoke to both skippers in an attempt to reduce the penalty count but with multiple infringements, the game lacked continuity, with neither side able to string together passages of play to stretch opposing defences.

With Gosport having the advantage of the wind at their backs in the second half, they quickly made it clear that they would use the boot to establish field position followed by the catch and drive from subsequent lineouts. Their first opportunity came after a couple of minutes, stealing a Maidstone throw in, but with the visitor's defence up to the mark, Gosport were denied.

A high tackle by Gosport on Brendan Trudgen, in full flight, was lucky to only incur a yellow card, but this put the home defence under even greater scrutiny and



with Nathan Simpson taking over at hooker, Charlie Williams in the second row and Josh Pankhurst at open side, the pack began to find an extra gear, stretching the home defence even further. With fifteen minutes on the clock, the pack established good field position and served up quick ball for a run round move that gave space on the left wing, with Caborn getting the scoring pass to increase the lead to eleven points.

From here, Maidstone looked increasingly likely winners. A quick tap penalty, by Ben Williams, near the half way line swept play down the field with Nathan Simpson the ultimate try scorer, wide on the right. And with the introduction of Perica at No.8, shortly thereafter, Maidstone found another gear.

His first contribution was a break from a line out showing his strength and speed but his score after only five minutes on the pitch was a classic pick up at the base, after a Maidstone scrum in the Gosport 22. This score stretched the Maidstone lead to 21 points and secured the win.

With the game into added time, Brendan Trudgen looked to have finished a dashing Maidstone move down the right with a try in the corner. But with a foot just in touch, the game was pulled back for a line out. This proved a mere inconvenience as Maidstone stole the ball and Simpson added a second score to his tally.

Maidstone were not yet done. With six minutes of added time on the clock, a move from their own half, with the ball going through multiple hands, saw man-of-the-match, Ben Knight, get the final pass to score by the posts, allowing Caborn an easy conversion and a final score-line of 33-0.

If Maidstone can distil the essence of the final twenty minutes of this game and carry it forward, they will find further successes await them. Increasingly, a pattern of improved second half performances has permeated this season without being able to dominate opposition teams early on.

One explanation is that the team has experienced many more injuries this season, with a consequent churn of the starting fifteen. Perhaps the New Year will be kinder in this department?

Maidstone Ben Williams; Josh Pankhurst; Jack O'Connell: Adam Knight; Tom Chandler: Charlie Williams; Ben Knight; Matt Iles: Lucian Morosan; Brendan Trudgen: Alex Clarke; Craig Webb; Ross Cooke; Matt Moore: Euan Caborn

Replacements: Felipe Perica; Nathan Simpson; Sam Pearson

