



Match Report

London & SE Division 1 (South)

Tottonians RFC 36 - Maidstone FC 16

Played at Water Lane, Totton, Saturday 14 January, 2017

Going into this game, Tottonians sat at the top of the mid-table group in the league and their ultimately comfortable, 36-16, win over Maidstone demonstrated why. They had a potent three quarter line, passed well to keep the ball moving and defended strongly when Maidstone attacked. The only area where Maidstone demonstrated superiority was in the pack. But this was not enough, on the day, to construct a winning position.

With Rory Beech and Alex Clark unavailable, Maidstone's back line had a much changed look. Ross Cooke moved to fly half, Matt Iles to the centre and Ben Brill, on his return after a long injury lay off, to the wing. In the pack, Filip Perica came in at No 8 and Charlie Williams took over from the unavailable, Adam Knight in the second row.

This combination of players gave everything to the cause, but with so many being asked to perform out of position, there was insufficient guile in attack to break down the Tottonian defence and match the opposition in try-scoring ability.

In addition, in the second half, Maidstone elected to use kickable penalties in the opposition half, to set up catch and drive, line out positions rather than opt for three points to keep the score board moving. This ultimately proved costly when the chosen strategy failed to yield points.

On a firm pitch with only a light wind to contend with, the hosts showed from the off how they intended to play the game. But their first attack on the Maidstone line came to grief when a floated pass was intercepted by Nathan Simpson and he galloped to over half way before being caught. But with support and a quick feed, Matt Moore was released to score in the corner.

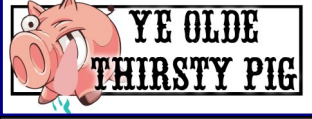
Tottonians hit back just past the ten minute mark with a try of their own. The initial position was a line out just in the Maidstone half but the break by full back, Clark, broke the Maidstone defence to allow centre, Buck, to claim the score. With fly half, Searle, notching the conversion, the hosts got their noses in front.

Maidstone hit back immediately. Reclaiming the ball after the restart, they took play deep into the Tottonians' 22, where a penalty was conceded to allow Caborn an easy conversion and restore Maidstone's lead.

Just before the end of the first quarter, roles were reversed, this time Maidstone conceding the penalty in their 22 and Searle putting the hosts back in front. This two point lead was consolidated by a try five minutes later, when Tottonians set up a catch and drive play in the Maidstone 22. While Maidstone defended the drive and the initial play from the three quarters to the right corner, the switch leftward gave wing forward, Raqio, the space to reach the line to post a 15-8 lead.

A yellow card for Tottonian's wing, Foster, for a high tackle, gave Maidstone a player advantage for the last period of the half and they took advantage just before the forty-





minute mark. Under pressure from a Maidstone attack, Tottonians conceded a penalty in their own 22 and Caborn duly converted to reduce the lead to 15-11.

After such a close first half, it was clear that the next score would be crucial. And so it proved, as Tottonians, starting with increased purpose, added a converted try after three minutes. A turnover in the Tottonians half saw full back, Clark, once more the instigator, with a move that set up the home side in the Maidstone 22. With the first thrust held, play was switched and second row, Ramus, was on the wing to take the scoring pass. A Searle conversion from the touchline extended the home side's lead to 22-11.

Maidstone hit back hard and had a fifteen minute spell when, led by the forwards, they battered the Tottonians' line. But the home defence held firm and with Maidstone electing not to take advantage of at least two, straightforward penalty attempts, they eventually came away empty handed.

With this storm weathered, the hosts then applied their own coup-de-grace, just past the twenty minute mark. From a turnover, Tottonians moved the ball to the left wing, releasing Baptista to run in from the 22. The Searle conversion moved the score to 29-11 and gave the hosts a comfortable lead entering the last quarter.

An interception try by Tottonians' Searle, just before the forty minute mark, and his conversion, gave the score a lopsided look which was countered just before the final whistle when Ross Cooke finished off a Maidstone move to score in the left corner and bring some consolation in the final 36-16 scoreline.

While the changes to the starting line-up, compared to last week, provide a solid reason for this loss, in reality, it was the sharper Tottonian attack that proved the difference. This time, the forwards were unable to work their magic against a side that defended in depth and Maidstone had to accept they were second best, on the day.

Maidstone Ben Williams; Josh Pankhurst; Nathan Simpson: Charlie Williams; Ben Massey: Ben Knight: Lewis Stimpson; Felipe Perica: Lucian Morosan; Ross Cooke: Ben Brill; Craig Webb; Matt Iles; Matt Moore: Euan Caborn

Replacements: Jack O'Connell; Jack Lamb; Simon Hawken (All used)

