



Brachers

law



Match Report



Shepherd Neame Kent Cup

Blackheath RFC 22 v Maidstone FC 18

Played at The Rectory Field, Blackheath

Sunday 17th November, 2013

Whereas Maidstone's two previous defeats this season elicited some criticism, this 22-18 loss to Blackheath inspires praise. Apart from the fact that Maidstone lost by the narrowest of margins, it was the home side that were hanging on at the final whistle and there were a string of positives to draw from this game.



The rules of the Kent Cup dictate that national league sides cannot play their first team in this competition but the team facing Maidstone had plenty of players on the park with top level experience and the pace at which the game was played confirmed the capability of the home side.



The pattern of the game was laid out from the first few minutes. Blackheath were pacy and adventurous outside, while Maidstone's coordinated play from the pack, led by their superb back row, with No 8, Matt Iles, the stand out player, posed all sorts of problems with their intense, short bursts, looking for the gaps in a well organised defence.

Another feature of the Maidstone play was their superb defence. While Blackheath managed to score three tries, none came from defensive lapses: all had to be worked on the outside, after the cover had been stretched past its limits. There were no slackers in this cause.

With Adrian Hogben unavailable, coach, Andy Foley chose to start Steve McNamara in the scrum half role, against his old club, with Alex Sturzu getting the nod in the second row and Danny Baker at tight head prop. For the rest it was business as usual and it was clear from the warm-up that the intensity in the preparation acknowledged the task they felt the Black-





heath fifteen would lay before them.

The start saw Maidstone opting for a high octane approach, throwing everything at the Blackheath side and being held up over the line after a series of plays in the home side's 22. With the try proving elusive, Caleb Van de Westerlo got the scoreboard rolling with a smartly taken drop goal on eleven minutes. But the intensity of the home side matched that of the visitors and, from the restart, they regained the drop out

and a sharp break by the outside centre set up winger, Dan Hamilton, to score in the corner.

The conversion from fly half, Cormac O'Flynn, hit the left hand upright and deflected outside the posts but his next was from in front, after left wing, Sean Moan, was set free in the Maidstone 22. Full back, Chris O'Neil, made the decisive break following the capture of turnover ball.



With the potency of the Blackheath backline amply demonstrated in the opening quarter, this could have resulted in one-way traffic. But Maidstone came back at their hosts with a vengeance. With 25 minutes gone, Ben Brill caught a drop out and with sharp passing from the resultant ruck, full back, Jensen, was given space to touch down out wide. With the Van de Westerlo conversion, Maidstone eased back to within two points of Blackheath.

With the half reaching its conclusion, Blackheath stretched their lead with a try by full back, O'Neil,



which, with the subsequent conversion from O'Flynn, took the lead to 19-10. But Maidstone managed to have the last say in the half, when Van de Westerlo slotted a 30 metre penalty to reduce the half time deficit to six points. This was reduced further to a single point, ten minutes into the second half, when a Neil Graves break in the centre was fed to Sam Brill and then skipper Ben Williams, who dived over out wide to set the home nerves jangling.

As the first quarter reached its conclusion, a drop goal from O'Flynn stretched the Blackheath advantage to four points and this is how it stayed through the last quarter of play. Firstly, Blackheath seemed to gain the ascendancy but Maidstone's defence refused to succumb to their onslaughts. And then, as the final whistle approached, it was Maidstone's turn to pressurise the Blackheath line. In the end, both defences refused to yield and the four point margin was preserved.

Games like this turn on small margins and the dropped pass at



the end of the first half, when winger Brill had the line in front of him, proved critical. But this was a superb team effort against a higher class of opposition than Maidstone are likely to face for the rest of the season. If they can translate the intensity they showed for the eighty minutes of this match into the rest of the league season, they are unlikely to be unduly troubled.

Maidstone

Ben Williams; Sam Bailey; Danny Baker; Ben Brill; Alex Sterzu; Jack Davidson; Jamie Sims; Matt Iles; Steve McNamara; Caleb Van de Westerlo; Sam Brill; Willie Brown; Neil Graves; Mark Dorman; Josh Jensen

Replacements: James Iles; Nick Bunyan; Josh Pankhurst; Brad Ford

