



Match Report

London & SE Division 1 (South)

Dover RFC 26 - Maidstone FC 45

Played at The Crabble, Dover, Saturday 17 December, 2016

Maidstone travelled away for the second week in a row, this time to Dover, to face another team below them in the league, and came away with a 26-45 win. While the margin was, ultimately, comfortable, they had to come back from an early 12-0 deficit and trailed for most of the first half. But once they found their feet against a robust Dover outfit, they ultimately earned a bonus point from a five try return.

Euan Caborn kept them in the game in the first half from the tee and contributed twenty points to the total, overall. But it was the pack that, once again, dominated the proceedings, consistently pushing the Dover eight in the scrums and winning their line out ball. A joint man-of-the-match award to Ben Williams and Nathan Simpson, for their front row dominance, reflected the pack's output but this was a decision that could have well have gone elsewhere, without demur.

The starting eight for this game reflected the finishing combination at Gosport, with Felipe Perica at No.8 and Matt Iles in the second row. An unchanged back line, with Rory Beech on the bench, also promised a deal of composure for the opening encounters, but this was to underestimate the opposition, who started strongly and competed throughout the afternoon.

With the sun shining and no wind, the only two factors that could affect play were the heavy pitch and the slope, of which Dover had first advantage. And how they reaped early rewards from these factors. With barely five minutes on the clock, a chip over the Maidstone line by the Dover fly half was regathered to take play deep into the visitor's 22. Quick recycling saw the ball move wide to the right for the winger to score in the corner.

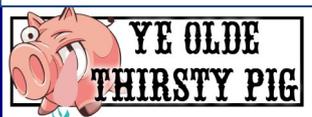
A few minutes later, Dover mounted a series of moves that stretched the Maidstone defence, firstly left, then right for the right wing to add a further try. A fine conversion from the touchline gave the home side a 12 point advantage with the visitors in some disarray.

But with Ben Williams asking for tighter defence and the pack raising their game, Maidstone quickly hit back with a Caborn penalty, shortly followed by a try from Josh Pankhurst, pouncing on a loose ball at the back of a Dover scrum on their own 5-metre line. This was just deserts after he had made a fine break from half way to set up the position. With Caborn adding the conversion, Maidstone found themselves only a couple of points adrift on the quarter hour.

With Dover able to protect their ball in attack, they set up a ten minute spell in which they continually stretched the Maidstone defence. Ultimately, they found a way through, once again the right wing forcing his way over. With a straightforward conversion by the full back, Dover forged a meaningful lead, once more.

HOSPITALITY
FINDER
The Home of Corporate Hospitality





But with the slow start out of their system, Maidstone hit back immediately, taking the play down to the Dover 22, forcing a Matt Iles' try through sheer power. With Caborn claiming the simple conversion, the Dover lead was reduced to two points again.

With Maidstone taking quick tap penalties, rather than kicking to touch, the first line out had to wait until the 35th minute. And with control in this department as well, the forwards continued to stretch the Dover defence, which ultimately yielded a kicking opportunity for Caborn shortly before half time.

With the last few minutes of added time well defended by Maidstone, they went into the break one point in the lead, 19-20.

Maidstone started the second period at a noticeably higher pace, with the intention of stretching the Dover defence. This yielded an early benefit as a tap penalty by Morosan led to a ten metre advance, allowing Caborn a simple goal attempt from the 22 to stretch the Maidstone lead to four points.

With Dover playing catch up for the first time, some of their early precision deserted them, allowing Matt Moore to intercept a long, floated pass to scoot in under the posts. With the conversion a formality, Maidstone began to show clear water for the first time.

But a moment of laxity by the visitors allowed Dover to reduce the deficit to four points just before the end of the third quarter. A spilled pass behind the scrum was snapped up by the Dover fly half to release play to the Maidstone line. While initial defence held, a thrust round a ruck close to the line allowed the Dover right wing to post his fourth score and with the conversion, bring the lead back to four points.

The last quarter, against a tiring Dover, was all Maidstone. The best try of the game came just past the half hour from a Maidstone scrum on the half way. With a wide blindside, Morosan quickly released Ross Cooke and, with Matt Moore inches from the touchline, the space was available to beat the initial defence. His well time inside pass saw Rory Beech available to score out wide to secure the try bonus point.

A fifth try was served up minutes later, when a strong follow up by Pankhurst of a Morosan kick, allowed the pack to pressurise the tiring Dover defence, with Craig Webb providing the coup de grace. A final Caborn conversion sealed the scoring.

With the departing Brendan Trugeon given a team send-off, Maidstone ended the game in full control. With fourteen points from the last three games, Maidstone came within a whisker of achieving Ben Williams' recently stated aim before the Brighton encounter, to end the first half of the season in a comfortable mid-table, sixth, position.

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

Replacements: Rory Beech; Will Fox; Tom Chandler

