



Match Report



London & SE Division 1 (South)

Sevenoaks RFC 20 - Maidstone FC 26

Played at Knole Paddock, Sevenoaks, Saturday 17 September, 2016



Local derbies between these sides have, in recent years, favoured the county town club. And this one was no different with Maidstone claiming the victory, 26-20. But this was no walk in the park, with the win only sealed by a late try, from Man-of-the-Match, Adam Knight, with minutes left on the clock.

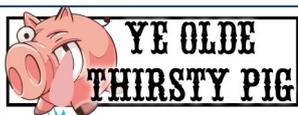
For the spectators, this was an engaging game of rugby with Sevenoaks sharp from the off, with a set of threequarters that stretched the Maidstone defence throughout. But ultimately, it was the combined nous of the Maidstone side that triumphed, refusing to be flustered, even when behind and showing remarkable defence to withstand a late flourish.

This was Ben Williams's 100th game as skipper and he got the second half revival underway with an early try that sparked Maidstone's comeback. The front five, together, gave another dominant display to secure regular set-piece ball, while the pack again delivered all the tries. Debutant, Nathan Simpson, coming on as a front row replacement, mid-way through the first half, showed his range of skills in the tight and loose and claimed a try of his own.

With Tom Waring and Danny Baker picking up knocks in last week's encounter with Dover, Alex Eastwood came in on the wing and Jack O'Connell reverted to his front-row starting position. Ben Brill started at No 8, with Ben Knight dropping to the bench to accommodate Josh Pankhurst at blind-side, with Lewis Stimpson starting at open-side flanker.



Maidstone kicked off into a deceptively strong breeze and for the first quarter of the game barely crossed the half way line. Time and again, handling mistakes stopped any



momentum and Sevenoaks took full advantage. After ten minutes, a scrum on the Maidstone 22 gave the hosts a good attacking position and slick inter-play saw centre, Winter, cut back inside the Maidstone defence to score under the posts. With Winter also making the simple conversion, Sevenoaks posted a 7-0 advantage.

Winter was to rub more salt into Maidstone's wounds, five minutes later, from a penalty kick 30 metres out. The ten metre advance for interfering with a quick tap made the conversion a formality and left the visitors facing a ten point deficit.

With Jack O'Connell side-lined after twenty minutes, Nathan Simpson was called into action sooner than he might have expected but immediately showed his mobility around the field with a crunching tackle to stop a Sevenoaks attack in its tracks. Indeed, his introduction heralded the watershed in the game as the Maidstone pack began to make inroads into the Sevenoaks defence and the back line began to build some momentum of its own.



As the half approached its end, Maidstone's pressure yielded fruit. A turnover ball from a lineout in the Sevenoaks 22 was spun wide and while the initial thrust was parried, the intensity of Ben Brill's run for the line ultimately yielded the try, under the posts, allowing Trudgen an easy conversion to reduce the deficit to three points.



Which was where everyone expected the score to remain at the half. But a superb piece of play by Sevenoaks, which saw them turnover Maidstone's ball in their own 22 and break out to release right wing, Weston, to score under the posts, at the other end, gave them a 17-7 half-time cushion.

With the wind having picked up somewhat since the start, Maidstone elected for a simple territorial strategy for the second half, which Trudgen delivered to good effect. With only a minute on the clock, a long kick from the Maidstone 22 found touch deep in the Sevenoaks 22 after being touched by the Sevenoaks full back. The resultant catch and drive saw the ball reach Ben Williams for him to power over to reduce the deficit to 17-12.

A third Maidstone try, just before the ten minute mark, this time in the right corner, followed another long kick to touch by Trudg-



eon. The resultant catch and drive was held but with Maidstone going forward, the following scrum yielded a strong attacking position, which saw Simpson get the touch down to level the scores. The fine conversion from the right touchline by Trudgen put Maidstone's noses in front, but with half an hour left to play, this was too fine a margin to sit back on.



Both sides struggled to dominate and a penalty to Sevenoaks, with five minutes remaining, just 35 metres out, in front of the posts, gave them the opportunity to get their noses back in front. Game management was now at a premium but, from the restart, a defensive mistake which saw Sevenoaks caught with the ball in their own 22, rather than put in a relieving kick to touch, provided Maidstone with the opportunity to regain the lead.

Turning the ball over, Maidstone probed left from the maul and Adam Knight was on hand to make the try line in the corner. Trudgen's conversion from the touchline added the icing to this score and gave Maidstone a six point cushion.

The last five minutes was all Sevenoaks attack, but Maidstone were in no mood to compromise and their defence was uncompromising to the last.

This was a fine win against a spirited side who posed many questions. But Maidstone remained calm under intense pressure, at times, and demonstrated their increasing maturity as a side. There is still a lot more to come but this win will bolster their confidence for future battles.

Maidstone Ben Williams; Will Massey; Jack O'Connell; Adam Knight; Ben Massey; Josh Pankhurst; Lewis Stimpson; Ben Brill; Lucian Morosan; Brendan Trudgen; Alex Eastwood; Rory Beech; Craig Webb; Leon Olson; Matt Moore
Replacements: Ollie Newton; Ben Knight; Nathan Simpson (All used)

