



Match Report

London & SE Division 1 (South)

CS Rugby 1863 33 - Maidstone FC 29

Played at Chiswick, Saturday 18 February, 2017

After last week's wintery conditions, the visit to CS Rugby's ground by the Thames, bathed in sunlight, with temperatures indicating that spring is on the way, was a stark contrast. Likewise, the outcome of this match ended up differently from the previous week, with a narrow 33-29 defeat.

CS Rugby are a side that have challenged at the top of the table all year, so such a narrow margin of defeat could be taken as a positive outcome. But this would ignore the severe disappointment of losing a game that could have been won.

Maidstone's attitude, throughout, was to go for the win, even when they were chasing the game. Whether a more conservative approach might have yielded a better outcome is a moot point, as touchline nerves were shredded in the final quarter of the game.

But with a four-try bonus added to the losing bonus point, Maidstone came away from the game with their heads held high and added to the unexpected win against these same opponents at the Mote, earlier in the season.

With Adam Knight unavailable, due to family commitments, Charlie Williams came into the second row for this game. Skipper, Ben Williams was restored to the starting line-up, swapping with Danny Baker, who returned to the bench and the back line was unchanged from the previous week.

The first quarter of the match belonged, very much, to Maidstone. Lucian Morosan made an early break that should have resulted in a try but there was compensation, a few minutes later, when Matt Iles broke off the back of a scrum to feed the ball wide, to allow Matt Moore to score in the right corner.

While the conversion drifted wide, Euan Caborn made amends on the quarter-hour with a penalty, to stretch Maidstone's lead to eight points. Suddenly, CS Rugby woke up and began to show slick handling and penetration in their backline. A move that went first to the right and then back left saw centre Direen touch down in the corner.

Just before the half hour, the hosts took the lead. This time a catch and drive yielded the position and scrum half, Humphreys, provided the final touch to score. With fly half, Hodgson, adding the conversion, CS Rugby got their noses in front, 12-8.

Maidstone were next on the scoreboard with a classic Ben Brill run from half way, following a scrum. His surge past the cover showed he is getting back to his best and with Caborn adding the conversion, Maidstone regained a narrow, three point, lead.

But the hosts were not to be denied, as their three-quarters demonstrated slick handling and passing, to stretch the Maidstone defence. While Maidstone scrambled to protect their line, a penalty just before the forty minute mark gave the hosts the opportunity to set up another catch and drive. This time scrum half, Humphreys, lobbed the ball over the defence to left wing, Banda, to score in the corner and with Hodgson mak-

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ing the conversion, CS Rugby finished the half, 19-15, in front.

The start of the second period saw the hosts extend their lead with only three minutes on the clock. A superb cut-out pass gave full back, Houston, a clear run to the line and with the conversion, their lead extended to 26-15.

With CS Rugby thinking and acting quicker than Maidstone, a heavy defeat became a possibility. But with their dominance, slackness entered their game, and an interception by Sam Pearson, on his own 22, saw him outpace the defence to score under the posts, bringing the deficit down to four points, with Caborn's conversion.

With only ten minutes on the clock, all options with regard to the outcome remained open. CS Rugby continued to look to provide width to get behind the Maidstone defence: for their part, Maidstone's pack began to dominate in the tight and make individual breaks through the home side's defence.

Twice Maidstone elected for attacking scrums on the CS Rugby line, following penalties, rather than kick at goal, and twice their efforts at getting the touchdown were thwarted. Was this attacking intent rash, or foolhardy? What was clear was Ben Williams' intent to go for the win and this looked like it had been achieved after 35 minutes of the half when Josh Pankhurst finished off a catch and drive.

With Caborn's conversion giving Maidstone a three point cushion and CS Rugby's second row in the bin, after pulling down a maul, the prospect of a win grew. But the hosts had other ideas and battered at Maidstone's line, resulting in a penalty in front of the posts. With their scrum depowered, the hosts took a quick tap, outwitting Maidstone's defence, with Hodgson claiming the seven points to restore their lead.

With a numerical advantage, Maidstone camped in the CS Rugby half for the remaining period of added time but couldn't conjure the final ingredient to get over the line, and so, had to settle for two points, rather than five.

This game was, ultimately, a composite of Maidstone's season. The pack performed well and delivered their fair share of attacking ball but the three-quarters couldn't find sufficient spark to penetrate their opposite numbers and keep them on the back foot. The result was a narrow line of attack, which, with pitches improving, is insufficient to disturb the best teams in this league.

Maidstone Ben Williams; Josh Pankhurst; Nathan Simpson: Charlie Williams; Ben Massey: Lewis Stimpson; Ben Brill; Matt Iles: Lucian Morosan; Euan Caborn: Shaun Woolford; Craig Webb; Ross Cooke; Sam Pearson: Matt Moore

Replacements: Tom Chandler; Danny Baker; Filip Perica (All used)

