

Match Report

League - London 3 South East

Tunbridge Wells 12 v Maidstone 19

Played at Tunbridge Wells, Saturday 20 October 2012

This game was targeted, at the start of the season, as the first real test of the Maidstone team's chances of being in the mix for promotion at season's end. The 19-12 scoreline, in Maidstone's favour, answered the question positively and also highlighted the validity of the proposition.

This was a game of contrasting skills, played on a wet pitch that increasingly cut up as the game progressed. Tunbridge Wells possessed the sharper skills outside the scrum and in the first half, in particular, were half a yard faster than Maidstone in the loose. But Maidstone possessed the power up-front and, in the second half, put it to good effect, grinding down the home pack and denying the opposition the ball. At the final whistle, Maidstone were fully in control of the forward battle and showed themselves to be rightful winners.

From the team that had played the league match against Pulborough, two weeks previously, there were a number of forced and positional changes. Both Matt and James Iles were recalled to the starting pack and Alex Hadi came into the second row. This allowed Lee Evans to start at No 8, with Richard Parker moving to blind side. In the backline, an injury to Lucian Morosan allowed Ivan Walkling to start at scrum half with Mark Dorman taking on the full back role.

Maidstone played up the slope in the first half and on a cloying pitch, they elected to play for territory, kicking deep into the Tunbridge Wells half whenever the opportunity presented. The early encounters saw Maidstone having the territorial advantage but penalty errors too often nullified the hard work put in to gain the initial advantage. And as the half progressed, Tunbridge Wells came more into the game, kicking astutely to turn the Maidstone line and exploiting hesitancy in the final lines of defence.

With no scores on the board and the half time whistle approaching, Tunbridge Wells struck to take advantage of their positive approach play. A knock on at the base of the scrum in the Maidstone 22 gave an attacking advantage to the home side, when a simple clearance should have relieved pressure. After the reset, Tunbridge Wells got the ball away to their right wing and although the cover matched the attack, covering scrum half, Rory Reames, took the inside pass and crossed in the corner. With Allman making the conversion from the touchline, the home side took a 7-0 lead into the break.

The response from Maidstone was emphatic and swift. Restarting the second half with the slope in their favour, the visitors controlled the early exchanges, the forwards punching their way down field through a series of carries. Awarded a penalty ten metres from the Tunbridge Wells line, Maidstone elected to scrummage. And with a further penalty five metres further forward, they elected to do the same again. This time, although the surge from the scrum was held on the line, the ball was shipped out to Willie Brown who crossed for the try, by the posts, making the conversion a formality for Jason Smith.

From the restart, Tunbridge Wells came back at Maidstone and secured a penalty on the Maidstone 22, which Allman drifted just to the left of the posts. Some hesitancy in the Maidstone defence, which should have cleared the ball, allowed the following Tunbridge Wells attack to secure a try when the ball squirted loose. Surprisingly, Allman missed the routine conversion but, once again, Maidstone were behind.

With the recipe for success clear, Maidstone resumed their driving tactics, once they had regained the ball, and, with 15 minutes on the clock, got back on the scoreboard, this time with a penalty try. With the ball in the back row, from a set scrum on the Tunbridge Wells five metre line, the home side moved too quickly, before the ball was over the line and Maidstone reaped the advantage. Jason Smith's conversion was a formality and this posted a narrow, two point lead for the visitors.

Maidstone continued their driving tactics and, with the home scrum going backwards, one collapse too many saw prop, Harvey, yellow carded, facilitating a try for Maidstone at the next scrum. Richard Parker got the touch down on this one, picking up with centimetres to go, to post a seven point cushion for the last ten minutes.

Apart from one last scare, where an interception on Tunbridge Wells 22 was hauled down by Mark Dorman in the Maidstone 22, Maidstone's forward dominance continued to dictate the terms of the game. But there was a collective sigh of relief, from the Maidstone players and spectators alike, when the final whistle sounded, reflecting the close nature of this encounter and the recognition that this was not, by any means, a routine victory.

Ben Williams; Sam Bailey; Danny Baker: James Iles; Alex Hadi: Richard Parker; Matt Iles; Lee Evans: Ivan Walkling; Willie Brown: James Davies; Neil Graves; Dane Smith; Jason Smith: Mark Dorman: Replacements: Nick Bunyan; Josh McKenzie; Paul Hyland