



Match Report

London & SE Division 1 (South)



Chiswick RFC 21 - Maidstone FC 35

Played at Dukes Meadow, Chiswick
Saturday 22 October, 2016



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Maidstone halted their losing streak with this solid 35-21 win, away to Chiswick. There were some bright spots in this performance, notably from Craig Webb, Josh Pankhurst and Lewis Stimpson but it was only in the final quarter that they managed to turn field dominance into points and allay nagging doubts about the required ruthlessness to secure the win.

The game was dominated by some poor handling, from both sides, along with Maidstone's inability to interpret the referees requirement concerning joining the ruck from the back. This led to a series of penalties, letting Chiswick off the hook on too many occasions and squandering good field position.

Only in the final quarter, when Maidstone upped the speed of the game, scoring three times, did they dominate a side lacking in attacking vision, playing predominantly through a big, lumpy set of forwards. But there were some other positives, namely a strong defence, dominance in the scrums and parity in the line out.

With the late withdrawal of Rory Beech and the hand injury to Ben Brill, incurred in the last game, a number of changes were necessary in the line-up. Josh Pankhurst moved back to hooker, Matt Iles, making a welcome return, took over the No. 8 slot, Seve Manu came in on the wing for his first game and Alex Clarke took over the full back slot.

The message from the coaching staff before the game was clear: more penetration was required from the back line allied to the need to improve team play. The first part of these requirement were amply demonstrated from the off, as both Craig Webb and then Ross Cooke made decisive breaks in the centre to set up attacking positions deep in the Chiswick 22. Ben Williams gained the touch down, on ten minutes, as the pack took advantage of the earlier work.

Unfortunately, the ball fell from the tee as Cooke attempted the conversion, from in front of the posts, limiting the gain to five points. But he amply made amends, five minutes later, by converting a penalty from 30 metres, after a high tackle.

Just before the end of the first quarter, Chiswick hit back with a penalty of their own, when the fly half converted impressively from the touchline, to remind Maidstone of the dangers of transgressing the laws.

The next score, on the half hour, went to Maidstone and demonstrated where their strengths lay. A quick tap penalty on their own ten-metre line was swiftly fed, through a number of hands, to Matt Moore on the left wing. He outpaced the cover and ran in from the 22, to score in the corner. This time the conversion hit the upright.

An exchange of penalties completed the scoring for the half, giving Maidstone a



6-16 advantage. But with Maidstone making a number of breaks in the centre, they should have had at least one more score. Strong defence by the home side allied to poor execution by the visitors conspired to leave only a ten point differential.

Chiswick started the second half brightly and clawed their way back into the game. An early 40 metre penalty saw the Maidstone lead reduce to seven points and, as Chiswick gained confidence, so they put Maidstone under increasing pressure, which ultimately yielded a converted try, to level the scores on the twenty minute mark.

The main point of attack for Chiswick was the rolling maul following line outs. Ben Massey incurred a yellow card stopping an early attempt on the Maidstone line and, although the defensive effort by the remainder of the side continued, the numbers deficit eventually told. Another catch and drive eventually led to a score, which, with the conversion, levelled the score at 16-16.

Chiswick subsequently had a chance to take the lead, when Maidstone were still a man down. But the left wing dropped the ball with the line in his sights and, with the return to a full complement, Maidstone came back into the game.

Once more the instigator was Craig Webb, his inside pass allowing Brendan Trudgeon to touch down half way out. With Ross Cooke adding the extras, Maidstone began building a points cushion. But Chiswick refused to lie down and, following a penalty in the Maidstone half, the hosts punted to touch deep in the visitor's 22. When the initial catch and drive was held, a long kick by the fly half to the corner allowed the left wing to make amends for his earlier miss, touching down out wide. With the conversion going the wrong side of the posts, Maidstone were left with a slim, two point, lead.

But the final ten minutes belonged to Maidstone, with Craig Webb providing the coup-de-grace with two tries, the second from another quick tap, which caught out a tiring defence. One further conversion, from the boot of Ross Cooke, brought the final tally to 35-21, which while it didn't flatter the rugby played by Maidstone, did put a gloss on the game management employed.

Maidstone are still a work in progress but they did show a keener cutting edge in attack this week. If they can convert more of their good attacking work into points and reduce the penalty count, they will dominate and win games more easily.

Maidstone Ben Williams; Josh Pankhurst; Nathan Simpson; Adam Knight; Ben Massey; Ben Knight; Lewis Stimson; Matt Iles; Lucian Morosan; Brendan Trudgeon; Seve Manu; Craig Webb; Ross Cooke; Matt Moore; Alex Clarke

Replacements: Jack Lamb; Danny Baker; Jason Smith (All used)

