



Match Report

Shepherd Neame Kent Cup Plate Competition Round 1



Folkestone RFC 19 v Maidstone FC 41

Played at The New Burlington Field, Saturday 25th February 2017



Cup games are notorious for upsets, as the underdogs, with nothing to lose, put their heart and soul into their attempt to spread egg over the faces of their more illustrious opponents. While Maidstone came away from this game with a solid victory, Folkestone could claim to have won a close-fought first half, at the same time demonstrating they had some talented performers in their ranks.

After some balmy conditions last week, winter returned for this encounter. A strong, cold breeze, blowing at an angle, down the pitch, had a strong influence on the game. Playing into this wind, in the first half, Maidstone found it difficult to exert sufficient control to subdue a lively Folkestone pack abetted by a fly half, who could kick for position or set up moves through some pacey outside runners, at will.

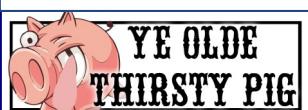
Maidstone fielded a much changed team from the previous week. With Harry Cole, making his debut at hooker, along with Jack Johnson, a recent recruit from Cranbrook, starting at flanker, the pack looked less powerful than normal. But with Adam and Ben Knight both returning to the fold, and Josh Pankhurst on the bench, this ultimately proved sufficient to overcome the Folkestone eight.



Likewise, in the backs, with Filip Perica stepping into the centre, the return of Rory Beech to the starting line-up, with Alex Clarke on the bench, added much needed alternatives to the mix.

Playing into the elements for the first half, Maidstone started as if they intended to settle the outcome early. From the kick off, the backs and forwards combined to probe the hosts' defence with first, right wing, Sam Pearson, making good ground before the





ball was switched left for Matt Moore to touch down in the left corner. Caborn's conversion attempt hit the post before bouncing out but the conditions equally affected the Folkestone kicker, as two penalty chances, well within range, drifted wide of the posts before Maidstone got themselves onto the scoreboard again.

This time it came from a catch and drive set up from a penalty conceded by Folkestone on the half way. With Johnson getting the touchdown, on his debut, and Caborn making the touchline conversion, Maidstone moved into a 12-0 lead with fifteen minutes on the clock.

Rather than underlining to the visitors how to control the game, the deficit inspired Folkestone to get back into the game. A spell of pressure in the Maidstone 22, eventually gave the Folkestone fly half the opportunity to dummy his opposite number and score under the posts, making the conversion a formality, reducing the deficit to five points at the end of the quarter.



The yellow card issued to Ben Knight, for an injudicious attempt to delay the ball at a ruck, significantly influenced the game over the next ten minutes, as Folkestone used their man advantage to good effect with two, well taken, tries.



The first came from the right wing, set up cleverly by the fly half, while the second was a piece of individual brilliance by the latter, to run from his own half through the Maidstone defence. With the first try converted, the Maidstone lead disappeared, giving the hosts a narrow, 19-12, lead. With Ben Knight restored to the play, Maidstone clawed a try back, just before

the interval, to reduce the deficit to two points.

Unusually, Maidstone returned to the dressing room at half time. Whether this was to get some warmth into cold hands or for coach, Mike Hebden, to read the riot act to his charges, is not clear. But Maidstone started the second half with Josh Pankhurst restored to the front row and a more determined look in their collective eyes.

Rory Beech was immediately on the scoreboard as Maidstone set off at a high tempo. Man-of-the-match, Lucian Morosan, released



his partner to score wide in the right corner and to restore Maidstone's lead.

Morosan bagged the next try at the end of the quarter. This was set up by a catch and drive. With three attempts by the forwards to force their way over, resisted by strong Folkestone defence, it was left to the scrum half to finish proceedings.

As Folkestone legs tired, Maidstone began to dominate. Matt Iles was presented with a straightforward scoring opportunity by Morosan on the half hour and he then cut a superb line in the centre to set up Alex Clarke for a straightforward run-in for another. With Caborn adding both conversions, Maidstone

stretched the gap to 41-19 and wrap up the game.

The last few minutes saw Maidstone throwing the ball around in the Folkestone half but with pride at stake, the home side stuck to their task and defended admirably, to limit the deficit.

Maidstone's superior fitness proved decisive in the final quarter as the hosts ran out of steam. Overall, a banana skin avoided rather than a demonstration of superior capability for eighty minutes. On the positive side, it allowed a number of players to show their capability at this level or to get game time after return from injury.

Maidstone Ben Williams; Harry Cole; Will Fox; Adam Knight; Charlie Williams; Ben Knight; Jack Johnson; Matt Iles; Lucian Morosan; Rory Beech; Matt Moore; Filip Perica; Craig Webb; Sam Pearson; Euan Caborn

Replacements: Tom Chandler; Alex Clarke; Matt Cooper; Josh Pankhurst (All used)

