



Brachers
law



Match Report



London Division 2 (South)

Promotion Playoff

Gosport & Fareham RFC 14 v Maidstone FC 10

Played at Gosport Park, Gosport, Saturday 26th April, 2014



Disappointment was the feeling that emanated from this game as Maidstone came up just short of the victory they craved to achieve promotion to London League 1 South. As with all the losses incurred this year, it was within one score of victory but the bitterest pill of all was that Maidstone played the better rugby and, based on their second half display, deserved to win.

But when calm reflection is brought to the analysis of this match, the brutal facts will lead to the conclusion that failure to carry out the basics, well enough, led to Maidstone's downfall. First and foremost, winning only two of eleven line outs, on their own throw in, gifted the initiative to Gosport on too many occasions and, in the final analysis, the passing wasn't crisp enough to take advantage of the many line breaks achieved, particularly in the second half. This is not to deny the excellent defence mounted by the home side but for most of the second half, they were clinging on to a slender lead by their fingernails.



With heavy rain the previous day leaving a wet top surface and heavy April showers falling throughout the match, the conditions were not ideal for the type of rugby favoured by Maidstone. And as the teams lined up, it would have seemed that the obvious physicality of the Gosport eight would trouble Maidstone's lighter pack. In fact, Maidstone dominated in this area all game, easily controlling their own ball and continually putting the opposition under pressure in the tight.



Maidstone fielded pretty much a full side with a couple of surprise selections, Nick East starting at openside flanker and Sam MacPherson at scrum half, with Lucian Morosan on the right wing. The thinking behind this was, undoubtedly, to give options within the game but only with changes made at half-time did Maidstone begin to look the dominant side.

The first quarter was notable for the basic handling errors made by both sides, compounded by the rain and some questionable refereeing decisions, which inhibited the game's flow. Gosport settled the quicker, overcoming their nerves, while Maidstone still seemed to still have the coach journey in their legs. A building spell of pressure by Gosport, just past the twenty minute mark, took the play down into the Maidstone 22 and a strong run off a ruck by No 8, Madigan, followed by a slipped pass to fly half, Duncombe, saw Gosport open the scoring by the posts.



Duncombe's conversion attempt, surprisingly, came back off the crossbar to limit the damage but he made no mistake with a 30 metre penalty just before the half-hour, following an adjudged deliberate knock down by Maidstone. A second penalty for the same offence, two minutes later, this time from greater range, saw Duncombe stretch the lead to eleven points.



It was at this point that Maidstone began to exert themselves on the game and with five minutes of the half remaining, got back into the game with a Van de Westerlo penalty from within the Gosport 22. This followed a five minute period of Maidstone pressure, which stretched the home side to breaking point and ultimately incurred the penalty chance.

With another heavy shower closing out the half, catching the ball became a lottery once more and both sides were pleased to leave the field with the score at 11-3, to Gosport.

With Joel Byford replacing Luke Debnam, Josh Pankhurst replacing Nick East and Brad Ford on the right wing with Morosan replacing MacPherson at scrum half, Maidstone placed their bet on a more dynamic second half. And so it proved, with Pankhurst notable for a number of tackle-breaking runs. A silky break on the Gosport 22 by fly half, Van de Westerlo, after ten minutes, was stopped just short of the Gosport try line, only for the position to be undone by conceding a penalty at the ensuing line out.

But Maidstone were now beginning to find holes in Gosport's defence and a relieving kick by them was run back with interest by Jensen before passing to Willie Brown, who slipped a number of tackles to take him within metres of the Gosport line. A drive from the forwards gave him the final momentum to make the touch down, simply converted by Van de Westerlo, to reduce the deficit to one point, with only fifteen minutes on the clock.



For the next twenty minutes, Maidstone were clearly the dominant side, with Gosport's defence stretched to the limit on a number of occasions. A 30 metre penalty drifted just wide of the posts to deny Maidstone the lead they deserved and a subsequent penalty driven deep into the Gosport 22 was undone by the loss of the subsequent line out.

The period of dominance was ended with Nick Bunyan receiving a yellow card, after only five minutes on the pitch, for handling in the ruck, allowing Duncombe to add to his penalty tally for Gosport and stretch the lead to 14-10. Bunyan made it back onto the field just before the final whistle, just after Gosport blind side flanker, Snowden, suffered a similar yellow card for killing the ball in a ruck but, by this time, the home side were into their containment policy, slowing the game and killing time.



In the final analysis, Maidstone were beaten by a more limited side but one with a game plan to match the conditions and playing to their strengths. Gosport will now find out whether they have the strengths to match the teams in London 1 South next season, whereas Maidstone will have to go back to the drawing board to devise an improved strate-



gy to win promotion.

Coach Paul Hathaway and Director of Rugby, Sean Charlton, are already planning their approach, with a strong emphasis on improving the side's basic skills to complement the evident try-scoring capability throughout the side. Allied to better on-field management of games, this should provide a strong platform to launch next season's promotion push.

Maidstone

Ben Williams; Sam Bailey; Luke Debnam; James Iles; Gareth Ellis; Jack Davidson; Nick East; Ben Brill; Sam MacPherson; Caleb Van de Westerlo; Sam Brill; Willie Brown; Neil Graves; Lucian Morosan; Josh Jensen

Replacements: (All Used) Nick Bunyan; Joel Byford; Brad Ford; Josh Pankhurst

