



## Match Report



### London & SE Division 1 (South)

Sidcup RFC 35 v Maidstone FC 27

Played at Crescent Farm, Saturday 26 November, 2016



The plaudits that flowed from the Sidcup supporters for Maidstone's performance in this 35-27 loss were well earned. A much changed starting fifteen, ravaged by injury and illness, rose superbly to the challenge of playing the league leaders on their home turf and gave them a very uncomfortable last quarter.

While Sidcup always managed to keep a healthy margin on the scoreline, managing five tries to Maidstone's four, they were forced into a number of errors in defence that prevented them being in total control. Indeed, it was two late penalties that bolstered their final score and saw them home.

Maidstone's pack, once again, were dominant in the tight, pushing Sidcup off the ball on a number of occasions and re-established their control in the loose, which kept the opposition on their toes, throughout. While Ben Knight was awarded the man-of-the-match accolade for his work at blindside, any other member of the pack could have received it, without a murmur of dissent.

A brace of tries by Josh Pankhurst, another try and skipper's performance from Ben Williams, while Simon Hawken and Ian Lee, came off the bench, to catch the eye, all personified the spirit and determination in the side. In summary, this Maidstone fifteen played out of their skins for eighty minutes for a four-try bonus point but should be able to take forward the spirit generated into future games.

With Ben Massey, Lucian Morosan and Nathan Simpson all nursing knocks from last Saturday's encounter with Chobham, some rearrangement of resources was required. Charlie Williams deputised in the second row, Brendan Trudgen moved up to scrum half while Euan Caborn took over at fly half, with Sam Pearson coming in on the wing for the indisposed Matt Moore.



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GROUP

**SIBLEY  
PARES**

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**SHEPHERD  
NEAME**  
MASTER BREWERS

**Morlings**  
SOLICITORS

**topnotch**  
health club

*Designer*  
**Contracts**

**YE OLDE  
THIRSTY PIG**

**VIVID  
ASSOCIATES**



With so many changes against the undefeated league leaders, the degree of trepidation in the travelling Maidstone supporters was understandable. As it turned out, it was misplaced: but the way the game started, with Sidcup getting an early try from a precision kick by fly half Twyford to the waiting hooker, Hopkins, on the right wing, did not reflect the full eighty minutes.

Sidcup's early lead was consolidated by a second try just before the end of the quarter. A kick out of defence by Maidstone was run back by the Sidcup full back into the Maidstone 22. While the defence managed to withstand the initial thrust, when the ball came back into centre field, second row, Coughlan, was able to cross the try line unopposed. Hardy's conversion was a formality, complementing the much more difficult conversion of the first try and giving the hosts a 14-0 lead.

From the restart, Maidstone hit back with a Caborn penalty, awarded against Sidcup for pushing early at the scrum. But this was his last meaningful contribution to the game as he was forced to leave the field with a head injury. With Ian Lee replacing him, the back line had to undergo a major rejig, with Matt Iles moving to centre and Ross Cooke moving into fly half.



With this major setback still being digested, Sidcup moved further ahead, when, following a line out on the left, the ball was moved across field for right wing, Keeley, to score in the corner, extending the lead to 19-3. But Maidstone had the last say of the half.



A tap penalty saw them take play into the Sidcup 22. A catch and drive was held by the Sidcup defence but a subsequent penalty to the visitors on the Sidcup 5-metre

line saw the home eight pushed backwards. While this attempt was thwarted by further Sidcup illegal play, the reset eventually allowed Ben Williams to get the try from close range after the ball was moved swiftly left. With Trudgen adding the conversion points, the half time was reached with Maidstone 19-10 in arrears.

With Maidstone dominant in the pack, this was the option of choice to keep Sidcup on the back foot. But a break by Sidcup No 8, West, took play into the Maidstone 22 and,



with a penalty conceded to stop the attack, Sidcup set up a catch and drive to score in the corner and extend their lead to 24-10, with ten minutes on the clock. At the same time, replacement prop, Jack O'Connell, incurred a yellow card for an illegal tackle, compounding Maidstone's problems.

Sidcup went further ahead on the quarter hour, following another catch and drive. While the initial thrust was held, quick recycling saw winger, O'Leary, touch down in the left corner to generate a 19 point margin.



With the final quarter still to come, Maidstone refused to buckle and, while the league leaders might have expected to cruise through the final period, they quickly realised this was not going to happen as Maidstone claimed the next two scores to reduce the lead to seven points.

The first score was by Josh Pankhurst from a catch and drive in the left corner. The second was by wing, Sam Pearson, who reacted quickest to a bouncing ball in the Sidcup 22, following an up and under by the Maidstone full back, to canter in under the posts. Suddenly, Maidstone were one score from parity and asking serious questions of the hosts.

Two penalties by Sidcup full back, Hardy, the first on forty minutes and a second deep into injury time, saw the pressure relieved but Maidstone had the last say when from the last restart, they regained the ball and Pankhurst cut his way through the Sidcup defence to score in the corner. While the conversion missed and prevented a losing bonus point, Maidstone did come away with a try bonus for their efforts.

This was a return to form for Maidstone, based on a more clinical approach with the ball in hand. Considering the changes that had to be made, both before the game started and while in progress, it was a measure of the spirit among the players that they performed so admirably on the day. If this can now be taken forward into future games, Maidstone's current league position should improve.

**Maidstone** Ben Williams; Josh Pankhurst; Danny Baker: Adam Knight; Charlie Williams: Ben Knight; Lewis Stimpson; Matt Iles: Brendan Trudgen; Euan Caborn: Sam Pearson; Craig Webb; Ross Cooke; Copter Brunt: Alex Clarke

Replacements: Jack O'Connell; Simon Hawken; Ian Lee (All used)

