

TJ 4th XV 24vs.Maidstone 3rd XV 38

League: Invicta 3, Match 16

Mote Park, Maidstone,Saturday 16thFebruary. Kick-off 14:15

This week found Maidstone playing host to TJ's for the second time this season due to the match being unable to be played at TJ's due a waterlogged pitch. With them memory of the frustrating 3-0 loss earlier in the campaign still sore, Maidstone were keen to make amends and put in a strong and solid performance against a TJ's side that have consistently performed all.

The squad handed debuts to two new members, forward Ed Bower and back James Douglas, both recent recruits from Sutton Valance.

Maidstone started the match brightly and were playing up the slight slope. The pack had a sense of strength and power, whilst the backline had an excellent mixture of experience and youth. The initial stages of the match found both teams looking to test the other where possible, and although there was the occasional break by both sides, a handling error or incorrect decision prevented either from posting an opening score.

Maidstone were the first to add to the scoreboard. Being awarded a penalty about fifteen metres from goal, James Douglas kicked Maidstone into a three point lead. TJ's were not happy to be behind and were determined to get right back into the game.

From the kick-off TJ's looked to get their running game going and abandoned the tactical kicking which had not been effective during the opening exchanges. Looking to get their big forward runners on the ball in the first instance, setup some quick ball and the ship it to their backs, TJ's were looking to find a weakness in the Maidstone defence.

However Maidstone's biggest problem in recent weeks has been the number of penalties conceded which invite pressure on to the defence, and thus it was today. Giving away a penalty for going over the top, TJ's could have kicked themselves level but elected to run instead. Cleverly setting up a couple of phases, the ball was then shipped to the centre, where the attacking line was brought back inside dragging the Maidstone defence out of position, and allowing a long pass out wide for a three on one. Maidstone nearly prevented the score with Ian Howson pulling down the attacker just short of the line, but with a long reach, the try was scored. The score now 5-3.

Maidstone were to concede again very quickly. Again, another penalty gave the momentum to TJ's who pounded the ball deep into the Maidstone 22. Winning the resulting lineout the ball was kept tight in the forwards and short balls to runners kept the pressure on Maidstone. Inevitably this was to pay off for TJ's as the sheer power of the TJ's pack found a size mis-match and the try was scored. With the conversion, Maidstone were now down 12-3.

Some words of inspiration from Captain Tuggy followed and Maidstone knew that there was work to be done otherwise this match could get away very quickly. Playing to their strengths, Maidstone forced the in the attacking third, building phase after phase of controlled rugby. This lead to a clever break in the middle of the park by Dane Smith and a simple feed to James Douglas on the wing to run the ball home. Halftime and Maidstone were back in the game, 12-10.

The second half was to bring a whole new dynamic to Maidstone's play. Knowing that they had the beating of TJ's in the backs, the Maidstone looked to control the play and use the slope to their advantage. This paid off nearly immediately as another break in the midfield led to the ball being fed to Fergus Carty to touchdown in the corner. An excellent conversion and Maidstone were back in the lead at 12-17.

Maidstone were now in total control and started to have large spells of possession. The forwards were providing a solid platform on which to play and the whole team started to play some free-flowing rugby.

Somewhat against the run of play, TJ's posted the next score, again beginning from a penalty. Their third try a near carbon copy of their second. Maidstone again behind 19-17. To make matters worse, Nick East was yellow carded for dangerous play, and Maidstone were down to 14.

Not fazed by being behind, nor a man down, Maidstone resumed their game plan and were soon back in front. Breaking the line in the middle of the pitch, Dane Smith again produced an excellent pass for Fergus Carty to outpace the defence and a touchdown. The lead changing hands again; the score now 19-24.

The next try wasn't long away. From the kick off Maidstone didn't clear their lines and the ball was going back towards their own goal line. Captain Tuggy then had the opportunity to clear the ball, but instead of kicking, he found a gap in the TJ's defence that started a magnificent flowing move with forwards and backs inter-passing that would last the length of the pitch with Ed Bower getting the score. Maidstone were up by eleven, and possibly the best team try this season!

With ten minutes left in the match Maidstone were to post another score. Playing on the TJ's 22, Maidstone kept the ball moving and Dane Smith, producing another superb display in the centre, sidestepped his opposite number and ran clean through under the posts.

To their credit TJ's continued to attack when they could and with the last play of the match, they managed to produce another three on one out wide. The final score: TJ's 24 – Maidstone 38.

Maidstone can be really pleased with their second half performance. Taking the game to TJ's, the opposition could not deal with any of the Maidstone players. Excellent passing between forwards and backs, plus the belief to run at the defence and commit players produced some scintillating passages of play, not to mention that Maidstone scored three tries whilst down to 14 men. Maidstone still needs to work on the number of penalties that they concede, as too often these lead to tries, but today Maidstone put down one of the top sides in the league.

Captain's note - Today's MOTM performance goes to Nick East (SC) for the biggest contribution to both teams. He gave away most (all!) of the penalties for TJ's and during his 10 minute spell off Maidstone scored 3 tries!

It was good to see Chunk come through another game following his shoulder injury and he should be match fit by May, Fergus Carty made his mark in the 3rds and two new and young recruits make impressive senior debuts.

After the game Simon Wright realised he had suffered a bizarre finger injury called Mallet Finger. Appears that he snapped the tendon in his finger, no sense or feeling but a loss for the team as he has been playing well in various positions.

Squad:

Ross Laing: Richard Grey: Martin Maytum: Simon Wright: Ian Lee: Ed Bower: Lewis Fagg: Nick East:
Dave Tugwell: John Hogarth: James Douglas: Dane Smith: Alan McCabe: David Ruaux: Ian Howson:
Fergus Carty: Duncan McClintock: James Sullivan