

Canterbury Development XV 8vs.Maidstone 3rd XV 34

League: Invicta 3, Match 7

Merton Lane North, Canterbury, Saturday 10th November. Kick-off 14:30.

Maidstone headed down to Canterbury for the only League fixture taking place in Invicta 3 this weekend. Following the two defeats in their last two outings, Maidstone knew nothing more than a victory would be acceptable, and as added incentive, a win would move Maidstone from fourth to top of the league table. By contrast, Canterbury also headed into this game on the back of two defeats, but they have only won two of their five league games all season.

Due to players being unavailable, Maidstone again had to re-shuffle their squad. Indeed, all season, a total of sixty-one players have now turned out for Maidstone. The travelling squad had a fantastic array of talent; however the test would be whether the team could find the cohesion to secure the victory – especially in the wet, dank conditions. Notable selections included Tom Holmes playing at No 10, Fergus Carty playing at No 14, and Jack Hart returning after over a year out.

Maidstone played the first half up the slope and found a dogged Canterbury side that were very much up for this game. Maidstone started on the front foot pressing Canterbury back deep into their own half, and Canterbury's play was forced to revolve around clearing kicks down the park. This played right into Maidstone's game plan as the ball was run back time after time and for the first quarter Maidstone had most of the possession.

Maidstone's first score came about ten minutes in. Ten metres from the Canterbury line, Maidstone were awarded a scrum on the right hand side which was comfortably won. The ball was picked up at number eight who attacked the Canterbury No 10 channel. The ball was quickly re-cycled and moved into midfield where skipper Mike Laurenson powered over the line to the left of the posts. A great start and Maidstone were leading 0-5.

After the restart, Maidstone continued to dominate. The forwards were excellent at retaining the ball and the backs constantly made good ground when they had the opportunity to run. Sam Mann and Tom Holmes, both a creative thorn in Canterbury's side, showed their skills in linking the forward and back play through quick, smart play.

Maidstone's second score came from an almost identical situation and position to the first. This time, as the ball was re-cycled in the midfield, Edd Adams was on hand to carry the ball over for his first touchdown of the season. With Tom Holmes adding the conversion, twenty minutes in and Maidstone were leading 0-12.

This score seemed to make Canterbury come out with far more attacking intent. Canterbury adapted their play and stopped kicking the ball, and in turn this allowed them to have more possession. Steadily building their phases, Canterbury moved up the pitch and tried to use the slope to their advantage.

Pushing Maidstone back, Canterbury were looking for the gaps that would allow them through. They found Maidstone's defence was strong and well-organised and despite a sustained period of pressure, they could not cross the goal line. This did seem to dis-hearten Canterbury somewhat as

when they were awarded a penalty ten metres out, they elected to kick the points and reduce the deficit to 3-12.

The latter exchanges of the first half were largely played out in the middle of the pitch. Tom Holmes added a further penalty to restore Maidstone's twelve point lead to leave the half-time score Canterbury 3, Maidstone 15.

Maidstone started the second half brightly and were continuing to move the ball around dynamically. The forwards continued to dominate the Canterbury pack with the rolling maul working particularly well. Powerful running from Mike Blacker, Edd Adams and Sam Weston in the back row kept Canterbury on the back foot as they didn't know where the point of attack was going to come from. With Chris Tomlin and Justin Evans in the centres, Maidstone also had the option to punch holes in the middle of the pitch.

However Canterbury were resilient in their defence and Maidstone were guilty of several unforced errors causing the ball to be turned over on numerous occasions. Canterbury themselves were also prone to giving the ball away and it was from an error that Maidstone were to get their next score.

Playing in the middle of the pitch, Canterbury were looking to penetrate the Maidstone defence with their forwards. With the No 10 looking to expand the play, he shipped a long ball out to the No 13. With Maidstone's midfield defence line moving up quickly, this caused the No 13 to miss the pass and allowed David Ruaux to nudge the ball through the Canterbury back line to set up a foot race with the opposite winger. With the ball gathered in it was a simple run to the line. Tom Holmes added the two points and Maidstone had a commanding 3-22 lead.

Canterbury came back straight away, but the game was still being played largely in the middle of the park. Maidstone then conceded five penalties in the space of five minutes and found themselves back in their defensive third. With the defence holding strong Canterbury had no way through and Maidstone were able to clear, but in-discipline would cost Maidstone.

Conceding another penalty, Maidstone seemed to switch off as Canterbury took a quick tap and go just outside the Maidstone 22. With some slick interplay Maidstone were caught out and Canterbury touched down in the corner. The try went unconverted and the score was 8-22.

Perhaps a slight sense of complacency had slipped into Maidstone's play as within five minutes, another Canterbury tap and go penalty nearly cost Maidstone again, only this time some great cover tackling caused the ball to be fumbled over the line.

The final quarter of the game found Maidstone again the dominate force. Playing mostly in the Canterbury 22, the forwards had by now completely broken their opposite pack. From six metres out, another rolling maul pushed Canterbury over their line and Tom Holmes touched down and then added the extras for a twenty-one point lead.

Straight from the kick off Maidstone ran back at Canterbury and even though there was barely any time left, another score seemed possible. Breaking through several tackles, Mike Blacker powered deep into the Canterbury 22. Tackled just short of the line, a clever offload to Edd Adams allowed him to cross for his second of the afternoon. The final score, Canterbury 8, Maidstone 34.

This was just the result Maidstone needed after the results of the previous two weeks. Scoring five tries – this was a dominant performance, solid both in attack and defence. With around a third of the season gone Maidstone sit top of the league and with the next game against Deal and Bettshanger, Maidstone need to build on this performance to put pressure on all the surrounding teams.

Skipper Mike Laurenson has selected Sam Weston as this week's MOTM. With a scintillating display in the back row, Sam was superb in both attack and defence and was constantly causing Canterbury problems.

Squad:

Ollie Coomber: Chris Morton: Mark Thurgood: Matt Cooper: Lewis Fagg: Edd Adams: Sam Weston:
Mike Blacker: Sam Mann: Tom Holmes: David Ruaux: Mike Laurenson: Chris Tomlin: Jason Smith:
Fergus Carty: Jack Hart: Toby Young: Justin Evans