

Maidstone 3rd XV 15 vs. Edenbridge XV 10

League: Invicta 3, Match 10

The Mote, Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> December. Kick-off 14:15

Following the difficult game at Gravesend last week, Maidstone went into a top of the table clash with Edenbridge in their last League game before the Christmas break. With the squad taking on a powerful look, there was pace a power in all areas and a confident feeling that a victory could be achieved. Edenbridge came to the Mote on the back of four wins in which they have scored over forty points a game and conceded none.

The Maidstone squad also welcomed back Andy Bacon and David Ruaux from injury after three months and three weeks out respectively.

Maidstone started the game in blistering fashion and forced Edenbridge back into their own half. Retaining the ball really well, Maidstone built phase after phase of pressure with both forwards and backs combining well. Edenbridge's defence was well organised and some strong tackling meant that Maidstone were not able to break the Edenbridge line.

Eventually Edenbridge managed to get their hands on the ball and build some phases themselves. Looking to run the ball at every opportunity, the Edenbridge backline showed pace and invention, whilst the forwards showed power and strength. Rarely this term has there been a pack to compete with a full strength Maidstone, however Edenbridge were definitely showing that they had come for the win.

Despite all the good Maidstone play, the first score went to Edenbridge. Powering into the Maidstone 22, an offside at the ruck awarded Edenbridge a shot a goal. The simple 3-points were easily taken, and a somewhat frustrated Maidstone would have to come from behind.

Nearly instantly Maidstone battered Edenbridge back towards the goal line with Sam Mann providing some excellent attacking flair out wide, and Dane Smith and Justine Evans providing solidarity in the middle of the pitch. Combined with clever tactical kicking from John Hogarth, Edenbridge could never be sure what part of the pitch the attack would flow from.

Maidstone's first score was soon to follow. With a scrum near the Edenbridge five-metre line, the ball was picked up and passed to Dane Smith playing on the gain line. The simple touchdown under the posts followed. Bizarrely the conversion was missed due to a lack of a kicking tee, but Maidstone had the lead 5-3.

Now it was Edenbridge's turn to power back. With some superb combination play and quick recycled ball they forced a two on one, and although the winger decided to cut back in when clean through, the covering tackle could not prevent the ball being recycled and touched down. The difficult kick was made to look easy by the Edenbridge 13, and the halftime score was Maidstone 5, Edenbridge 10.

The second half saw the introduction of Andy Bacon after three months out with an Achilles and calf injury. Clearly pleased to be back on the pitch, he soon settled down to play his brand of consistent high quality rugby.

As the game restarted, Maidstone showed their intent as they did at the start of the first half. Powerful running in the forwards by Cezar Ionica, Mickael Majcher and Andy Bacon kept moving Maidstone up the park and allowed Maidstone to build a platform on which to play. The backline continued to test the Edenbridge defence and soon Maidstone were playing deep in Edenbridge territory.

With around twenty minutes gone in the half, Maidstone were awarded a scrum just outside the five-metre line. The ball was picked up at number 8 and a ruck formed on the goal line, Maidstone looked for the gap that would bring the try. Quick recycled ball found Cezar on the charge, and a second quick ball found Dan Taylor who powered through the flailing tackles to put the ball down by the posts. The conversion by Tom McCulkin gave Maidstone a 2-point lead.

With twenty minutes left to play Edenbridge came back at Maidstone. With an excellent spell of ball retention, Maidstone were forced to maintain discipline and clear their lines as any penalty could result in Maidstone being behind.

Despite Edenbridge's best efforts, the space to break the Maidstone line just wasn't there. The only opportunity they found was actually off a Maidstone handling error. A loose pass just outside the Maidstone 22 went to ground and the Edenbridge 13 pounced quickly to nudge the ball through. With the Maidstone defence caught off guard, the Edenbridge 13 had a clear run to the line – it was just a foot race to see who'd collect the ball first. To Maidstone's relief it was the defence that collected the ball and it was duly cleared. The final real action of the game came as Maidstone were also awarded a penalty with less than a minute to play and John Hogarth took the three points to make the score line: Maidstone 15, Edenbridge 10.

A superb performance by Maidstone against a team full of confidence, power and pace. This is undoubtedly one of the best displays this season and playing rugby like this, there is no reason why Maidstone cannot set their sights on the League title. With half the season gone, Maidstone occupy fourth place in the League. However, although Medway go into Christmas leading the way with 36-points; Edenbridge, Snowdown and Maidstone are all on 32-points separated only by point's difference – and Maidstone's next two fixtures – Snowdown and Medway, both away. Is it possible that Maidstone's season or perhaps even the League title will come down to the next two fixtures????

**Captains Note – What Dave has omitted in his excellent report, is the fact that it was him who ran from the wing to rescue the ball under the posts get to his feet and earn a penalty, a try that would have cost us the game. Brining Andy Bacon on at half time, I asked him to make a big impact. His first tackle smashed their flanker and our hooker who ended up taking a 10 minute rest with a damaged chin!**

**Numerous nominations for man of the match but for his composure and game management at number 10 John Hogarth had another excellent performance.**

Squad:

Mark Thurgood: Chris Morton: Cezar Ionica: Matt Cooper: Simon Wright: Tom McCulkin: Dave Jackson: Mickael Majcher: Dave Tugwell: John Hogarth: Sam Mann: Justine Evans: Dane Smith: Chris Tomlin: Ian Howson: Dan Taylor: Andy Bacon: David Ruaux