

Maidstone 3rd XV 12vs.Ashford 2nd XV 29

League: Invicta 3, Match 15

The Mote,Saturday 9thFebruary. Kick-off 14:15

Maidstone began the day looking to exact revenge against an Ashford side that have inflicted the home team's heaviest defeat of the current campaign. Although the tie earlier in the season was a complete mis-match, Maidstone's squad this time round had an powerful look to it and prior to kick-off there was a definite sense that today was a chance to put down a strong and determined Ashford team. Notable returns to the Maidstone squad saw Ian "Horse" Lee now aka "Findes" and Duncan "Chunky" McClintock both back after significant time off the pitch.

Despite the recent dip in form, Maidstone have still won all but one the their games at home this season, and following some difficult results, today would be the perfect opportunity to set up a strong run in towards the end of the current campaign.

From the kick-off it was Ashford that started the strongest. Maidstone allowed the power of the Ashford pack to push them back deep into their own half. Even though Maidstone were looking to move the ball when they could, it was the in ability to put together many phases that limited the movement away from their own try line. In discipline also crept into Maidstone's game and several penalties were conceded that forced Maidstone back whenever territory was gained.

It was from a penalty that Maidstone would suffer their first blow. The referee awarding the penalty for not releasing the tackled player, Ashford were playing just outside the Maidstone 5-metre line. Electing to give the ball to one of their big forwards, the Ashford player managed to find a size mis-match and use his weight to buddle the ball over the line next to the posts. With the conversion Maidstone were down by 7 and there was only just over ten minutes played.

Maidstone hadn't turned up and as a result Ashford had edged ahead. Typically with Maidstone, being behind brought a sense of urgency to their play. The backs and forwards started to link well and Maidstone began to play to their strengths. Using the size and strength of Martin Maytum, Simon Wright and Ian Wilkinson, Maidstone began to play some trademark short and sharp ball around the fringes of the breakdown.

Unfortunately, Maidstone were still suffering with indiscipline. Another penalty awarded just outside the Maidstone 22, found the referee moving the penalty forward ten metres for backchat. Using the same game plan as before, Ashford ran at the defence with one of their big, bulky forwards. The defence held off the initial run, but a couple of quick recycles found the ball going wide on the blind and Ashford crashing over again near the corner. The conversion kicked well and Maidstone were down by two scores.

Being fourteen points down, Maidstone then started to get their game truly together and an intense period of Maidstone pressure followed. For the first time in the match Maidstone were asking questions of the Ashford defence and when the backline were given the opportunity they proved how penetrating their runners were. Ian Howson particularly providing some inspired lines from fullback.

This pressure led to Maidstone moving the ball right up to the Ashford line. Maidstone used the ball cleverly, keeping it tight and secure. Eventually Simon Wright was able to gather and cross the line for a score, only for the referee not to award the try as he could not see the ball – much to the frustration of the home side.

With not much time left in the half, there was to be one more score before the whistle. Again a penalty conceded in their own defensive third, Maidstone encouraged Ashford onto them. For the third time Ashford managed to bundle the ball over the line using their big forwards. In a cruel twist, a completely unsighted referee awarded the Ashford score. The conversion was missed, but Ashford led at half-time 19-0.

Maidstone started the second half brightly and looked to take the game back to Ashford. The match was being played largely in the middle of the park but Maidstone again kept putting the phases together and controlled the ball well. But another conceded penalty about 25 metres out allowed the Ashford fullback to have a shot at goal. A kick superbly taken and Maidstone were a further three points down.

Maidstone were finally to get on the scoreboard shortly after the restart. With the interplay coming together, Maidstone found time and space on the ball. With the ball being moved across the whole width of the pitch, Ian Howson sold the dummy and the entire defence was wrong footed for the score by the posts. Mike Laurenson added the extra and Maidstone had a deserved score.

Maidstone's next score came shortly after. With the forward power play starting to wear down the opposition, Maidstone pounded Ashford back with penetrating runs and quick re-cycled ball. With the catch and drive working well at the line out, Maidstone were starting to get the upper hand. The relentless pressure told as Martin Maytum took the ball over the whitewash for the score. With time left in the match, Maidstone were back in at 12-22.

Unfortunately for Maidstone, Ashford upped their own game and each team began to cancel out the other, and with time almost up one of the few Ashford backline attacks capitalised on some poor tackling to add their fourth try. The final scoreline: Maidstone 12, Ashford 29.

The most disappointing aspect of today's match came from Maidstone allowing Ashford two scores before getting into the match. This match was there to be won, but the early concession made things all the more difficult. Ashford are a well organised and powerful team, and although their backline offered little invention, the forward play was effective. The Maidstone penalty count was also frustrating and it would be fair to say that had Maidstone not conceded so many penalties, perhaps the outcome may have been different.

Squad

Ross Laing: Rich Grey: Martin Mayhem: Matt Cooper: Ian Lee: Simon Wright: Tom McCulkin: Ian Wilkinson: Dave Tugwell: Mike Laurenson: Ally Moss: Ben Blacker: Alex McCabe: James Sullivan: Ian Howson: Duncan McClintock: Lewis Fagg: David Ruaux