

Maidstone V 10 Ashford III 10

Another impressive, battling performance saw Maidstone share the honours with a strong Ashford opposition. Maidstone's forwards were up against a strong and experienced pack and Ashford gained ground mainly through scrummaging, rucking and mauling, though their backs, once freed by the pack were difficult to stop as well. However, Maidstone had some driving moves of their own and used the forwards and backs in effective combinations to push close to the Ashford line in the early stages. Matt Ellesmere making a welcome returning guest appearance, though in the unaccustomed position of scrum half, delivered a well-timed pass to captain, Ian Ausher, who wasn't going to be stopped from the five yard line and finished the move to put Maidstone in front. The second try came from Richard Nunn, reminding all how frightening a prospect it is to have him bearing down on you at speed in the centres, crashing over. Ashford also had their first half chances, but the Maidstone defence held firm with the ferociously determined Simon Seal, in particular, chasing back repeatedly to batter players who thought they were clean through. Lloyd Chitty ran the ball heroically out of defence to set up good field position on more than one occasion and full-back, Hodges, finding himself confronted by a three man overlap rushed the Ashford centre, who finding himself receiving man and ball together was forced to try a tap pass and knocked the ball on.

With Maidstone's formation changed, Ashford came roaring back in the second half; their first try came from good old-fashioned scrummaging, as the Maidstone pack were driven back at a rate of knots and the Ashford number 8 was able to pick up the ball and touch it down unopposed. The second saw the backs combine to outstrip the defence, despite the valiant efforts of Luke Cox sprinting from the opposite wing to try and take the last man. Further heroic defence meant that the scores remained even, with Mark Ingram's last ditch tackle on the blind side dislodging the ball from the Ashford flanker's hands just before the line. Maidstone ended the match in the ascendancy, though, with several good attacking moves from the backs and forwards and it was only a penalty kick drifting agonisingly wide from the boot of the otherwise flawless Simon Seal that meant they did not come away with a famous victory.

This was another fine, committed performance from a team enjoying a competitive season and led inspirationally by Ausher.