



Match Report

RFU Senior Vase, Round 3

Hitchin 13 v Maidstone 39

Played at Hitchin, Saturday 1st December, 2012



Maidstone travelled to Hitchin on a cold, raw day to play this third round RFU Senior Vase tie against a mid-table side from the equivalent north-west London league and came away with a comfortable 39-13 victory. But this was not one of their better days, with a number of injuries to key players and a red card that could have significant repercussions.

With a number of late changes, the Maidstone side that took the field lacked the solidity of the previous few weeks, with the absence of Lee Evans leaving a big hole in the pack. On past performances, having Nick Buynyan to fill the gap should not have been a problem except that in the first play by the Hitchin forwards, he injured an ankle and had to leave the field, to be replaced by Alex Sterzu.

But this made no difference to the Maidstone pack and for 35 minutes they dominated their opposition eight, both in the tight and in the line out. Indeed, man-of-the-match, Josh McKenzie seemed to be able to hook the Hitchin ball at will with the nudge from the front five. And this allowed the threequarters to play their game almost entirely in the Hitchin half.

The first score came on five minutes, with Richard Parker taking an inside pass from Willie Brown to break the line and speed in from the 22. Sam Brill missed the conversion from the touchline but made amends on the quarter hour with a converted penalty just to the left of the posts.



A catch and drive in the Hitchin 22, from a penalty, allowed Maidstone to set a loose scrum and with quick ball, Willie Brown fed Morosan coming into the line from the wing, with opposite winger, Jack Naismith taking the outside pass to score in the corner, with a quarter of the match gone. Sam Brill added the conversion and Maidstone stretched into a 15 point lead.



Under increasing pressure and finding it difficult to contain the bigger Maidstone players, Hitchin resorted to harassing and niggling their opposition at every opportunity. With Maidstone once more threatening the Hitchin line, scrum half, Walkling was provoked after a penalty had been awarded to the visitors and lost his composure and his position on the field, being shown a red card.

In the five minutes remaining of the first half, Hitchin began to play with more authority and, with prompting from their fly half, began to play some rugby in the Maidstone half. Maidstone's defence, while stretched, held out until just before the whistle, but with skipper Ben Williams leaving the field clutching his ribs and Sam Bailey on in the front row, a penalty to Hitchin on the Maidstone 22, converted by their fly half, allowed them to get on the scoreboard.



Hitchin could see their opportunity to turn the game around and piled on the pressure from the restart. And within three minutes, they had reduced the arrears with a well worked try in the left hand corner to bring back the deficit to 8-15.



Suddenly, the Maidstone pack looked under pressure, Hitchin were getting more ball and bringing their threequarters into play on a wide, well grassed surface, and the visitors began to look uncoordinated. The defence held until the twenty minute point, when a relieving kick by Maidstone failed to find touch and Hitchin ran it back to establish a loose scrum on the five-metre line. After a number of thrusts, Hitchin got the

touch down, to reduce the deficit to two points.

It was 'make or break' time, and Maidstone stepped up to the challenge by scoring three tries in the final twenty minute period. The first was a typical Richard Parker crash to the line from a short pass, followed by a Willie Brown mazy run that allowed him to slip through six tacklers, to touch down by the posts.

The last came from Danny Baker, another short range effort, following a late surge from the pack. Sam Brill converted all these tries and added a 40 metre penalty to round out the score at 39-13.

With a few injuries and a sending off, this victory could have significant impact on the next few weeks. But while this game was poor in a number of respects, it saw a weakened team taking command of a difficult situation and showing that they are maturing as a unit. In previous seasons, this could well have turned into a loss when the pressure from the opposition came on but now, there is an inner strength that runs through the squad.





Maidstone

Ben Williams; Josh McKenzie; Danny Baker: James Iles; Nick Bunyan: Mickael Majcher; Paul Highland: Ivan Walkling; Willie Brown: Jack Naismith; Matt Iles; James Davies; Lucien Morosan: Sam Brill

Replacements (all used): Sam Bailey; Matt Vickers; Alex Sterzu; Fin Davis