



Match Report

RFU Senior Vase, Round 4

London & SE Regional Semi-Final

Maidstone 38 v Old Priorians 0

Played at The Mote, Saturday 2nd February, 2013

After a disappointing start in last year's league campaign, it was this equivalent cup fixture that allowed them to redefine their focus for the season; this time around and with a healthy lead in the league, the side were looking at the RFU's Senior Vase competition to do the same for completely opposite reasons. For the first time this season Maidstone had a home draw and welcomed to The Mote an Old Priorian side from the equivalent north-west London league, and the only other unbeaten side left at London 3 level; it needed little encouragement from Head Coach Andy Foley to provide the motivation for a group of players that have set success in this competition as their own objective for the season.



With a squad that has matured and grown in stature as the season has progressed, Maidstone took the field with a largely unchanged side from last week's tough league battle with Tunbridge Wells and were quietly confident of maintaining their unbeaten record. The only reshuffle saw a fit Mark Dorman restored to the centre and Ollie Newton returning to occupy the wing berth, with Josh Pankhurst moving to a strong bench that included Lucien

Morosan, Alex Sterzu and Mickael Majcher.

The home club always looked the more comfortable of the two sides but whether their two first half tries, playing with the advantage of the slope and to a degree the wind, would be enough against a Priorian side that were well organised and possessed a range of attacking options was always the question. However, it was Maidstone's second half performance that caught the eye, they showed resilience in defence and were ruthless in attack, demonstrating good ball retention as they played a high tempo offloading game to run in four more tries to seal this match.



It wasn't until the eighth minute that they created their first scoring opportunity with a penalty from a scrum 35m out, although the strong wind saw Sam Brill's attempt at goal drift to the right of the posts. Priorians never really managed to clear their lines from the restart and from a subsequent lineout with the home side demonstrating good ball retention through several phases of play Matthew Iles was on the end of the final pass to cross on the right 15m in from the touchline to open the scoring. It wasn't until the twenty fifth minute that the

next scoring opportunity appeared, when despite some good Maidstone defence they conceded a penalty in front of their posts. Inexplicably Priorian's James Booth's simple kick sailed wide of the goal in what was really their last opportunity to trouble the scorer.



Maidstone on the other hand needed no invitation, and on the half hour mark following some good forward play, a break down the left flank saw Willie Brown and Neil Graves combine to release Sam Brill who fed James Davies to cross and touchdown under the posts, with Brill adding the extras to give the home side a 12-0 lead. The home side continued to press for the remainder of the half and a simple penalty opportunity missed, plus a fumbled pass with the line begging deep into added time, following a good break by Josh Pankhurst saw Maidstone unable to increase their advantage at the half-time interval.



Playing with the elements Priorians started the second period the brighter and it was only Maidstone's solid defensive organisation that kept them at bay. The real difference between the two sides was in the threat they posed, whilst Priorian's attacking runners looked dangerous in the Maidstone 22 it was the home side's runners that looked to attack out of defence that always posed a threat. Having weathered Priorian's storm for the first ten minutes of the second half, Ollie Newton

fielded a poor kick from the visitors to launch the counter attack, and whilst the final pass went to ground the home side were now on the offensive. Continued forward pressure saw the visitors concede a 5m scrum under their posts, Priorian's scrum had been under pressure since kick off and Bailey's timing to take the strike against the head was impeccable, as the ball was quickly moved right with Willie Brown able to breach the defence to touchdown.

The home side then hit a 'purple patch' playing an excellent offloading game and with Priorians under increasing pressure they found it difficult to contain the wave of Maidstone runners; as the match entered the final quarter centres Neil Graves and Ollie Newton pushed deep into the heart of the Priorian's defence to feed Brown who still had work to do to touch down under the posts, despite an inconsistent game with the boot Brill added the extras to extend the home sides lead to 24-0. Ten minutes later it was the second rows that combined, with Lee Evans making the telling run and providing the offload to allow James Iles to go over to the left of the posts with Brill again on target to add the conversion.



Credit should be given to Priorians, as their heads had not dropped and they were still playing for pride in the shirt, but the hosts were in stunning form and relentless in their attack and with the final play of the match they broke from their own 22m keeping the ball alive through several phases before Brill was on the end of the final pass to cross wide on the right and then convert his own score.

In summary, Maidstone very much dictated the terms on which this contest was played, defensively they were sound, with both Ivan Walkling and Neil Graves putting in a strong defensive shift at the 'coal face'; and whilst Priorians were themselves defensively well organised and no push over, they had no response to Maidstone's high tempo offloading game. With the other regional semi-final between London 3NW's Beccles and Cantabrigians postponed due to a waterlogged pitch, they must now wait to see who they will host in the London & SE regional Final.



Maidstone

Ben Williams; Sam Bailey; Danny Baker: James Iles; Lee Evans; Paul Hyland, Matthew Iles, Richard Parker: Ivan Walkling; Willie Brown: James Davies; Neil Graves; Mark Dorman; Ollie Newton: Sam Brill

Replacements (all used): Josh Pankhurst; Lucien Morosan; Mickael Majcher; Alex Sterzu.