



Match Report

League - London 3 South East

Ashford 3 v Maidstone 33

Played at Ashford, Saturday 9 February, 2013

They say that the sign of a good side is when they play badly and win. While it would be harsh to say Maidstone played badly, they certainly didn't play well and yet came away as 33-3 victors at Ashford. But there was certainly a 'morning after' feeling about this victory.

Last week's triumph in the Senior Vase, with all the hype and adrenalin it generated, could have made this game into an anti-climax. But Ashford were not to be denied their eighty minutes of potential glory, being still well placed in the league, with pride and the potential of an upset if they could take the game to the visitors from the outset.



To counter this threat, Maidstone played at a high tempo from the opening whistle but their execution was not at the highest level and this allowed Ashford to keep themselves in the game. The pitch was heavy, which favoured the side wanting to slow the game down, allied to reluctance by the referee to adjudicate the breakdown with sufficient authority, and speed, to stop a succession of infringements, which added to the fractured nature of the game.

But all the class came from the Maidstone fifteen as they kept going back to a running game whenever the opportunity allowed and this was confirmed by the five tries they posted to secure the bonus points, once again.

With both Neil Graves and Mark Dorman unavailable in the centre, Matt Iles provided cover, while Alex Goodhew stepped up from the Mustangs to take the outside berth. Lee Evans was also an absentee with Alex Sterzu starting and Andy Bacon back on the bench after a long injury lay off.

Maidstone spent the first five minutes in the Ashford half, building pressure on the Ashford line and a five-metre scrum provided the cornerstone of the first try. While the first attempt by Ben Williams was held, a quick recycle saw Ivan Walkling feed Josh Pankhurst to score under the posts to make Sam Brill's conversion a formality.



Ashford began to get their own game together and a penalty against Maidstone for tackling the man without the ball gave Hall and easy three points from the visitors 22 to reduce the deficit to four points. Indeed, Maidstone's mistakes began to feed the opposition more opportunities but, despite a yellow card just past the twenty minute mark against Hyland for reacting to Ashford's aggressive play, the defence held firm and at no time did the home attack stretch the Maidstone defence.



A loose kick out of defence by Ashford, on the half hour saw it returned with interest by Sam Brill whose inside feed to Willie Brown saw him, in turn set up skipper, Ben Williams, to score by the posts. A second try, five minutes later, after a defensive kick by Ashford was charged down by flanker, Pankhurst, this time saw James Iles get the touchdown, also under the posts, to make Sam Brill's third conversion of the afternoon a formality.



The game was sealed after five minutes of the second half by a thrilling James Davies try in the left corner. The move started on the Ashford ten-metre line, with a Maidstone scrum, from which the ball was swept left to Willie Brown whose miss-pass gave Davies the time and space to make the corner. This time the conversion missed but the bonus point for the fourth try was consolation.

The second half became increasingly scrappy as Ashford came back into the game. One break by the No 8 took the play from his own half, deep into the Maidstone 22 and only a scrambling defence held him out. Maidstone's cause was not helped by a second yellow card of the afternoon, this time to Richard Parker, although the reason was obscure. But once again, the defence and team spirit proved too much for the hosts and it was Maidstone that had the last say with a try on the right wing, with Lucian Morosan getting the scoring pass from Walkling.

The conversion from the touchline made it four out of five for Brill, bringing up all the threes in the score.

For a gutsy performance behind a pack that did not have it all its own way, Ivan Walkling received the man-of-the-match award. But the front row showed a combined mental and physical strength to overcome a determined Ashford pack to also show their merits.



Maidstone

Ben Williams; Sam Bailey; Danny Baker: James Iles; Alex Sterzu: Paul Hyland; Josh Pankhurst; Richard Parker: Ivan Walkling; Willie Brown: James Davies; Matt Iles; Alex Goodhew ; Lucian Morosan: Sam Brill

Replacements (All used): Matt Vickers; Andy Bacon; Jack Naismith