



Match Report

League - London 3 South East

Sheppey 3 v Maidstone 33

Played at Sheppey, Saturday 9 March, 2013

After the celebrations following last week securing of the London 3(SE) league title, it was back down to earth this week as the county town club travelled to the Isle of Sheppey to take on their nearest rivals in the league standings. Despite having achieved two of their key objectives for the season, this was no 'dead rubber'; with the side looking to complete an undefeated league season and Sheppey very much in a dogfight with Tunbridge Wells for the second promotion spot. With one eye on next week's Regional Senior Vase Final, coach Andy Foley had decided to keep a settled side with the only changes from the side that had despatched Horsham so convincingly being the fit again Sam Brill returning at fullback, Matt Vickers starting at hooker and club stalwart Andy Bacon making his first start this season, in for the rested James Iles.



Both of the fixtures between these sides this season have been played muddy conditions that have not lent themselves to running rugby. In the reverse fixture in November, despite Sheppey having long periods of possession Maidstone were worthy winners without looking in any danger; on this occasion it was Maidstone who held sway particularly in the second half with the home side seldom able to cross the halfway line.

As would be expected, it was the home side that started the brighter and playing with both the slope and the wind had very much the better of the opening ten minutes; but it was once Maidstone got to grip with the conditions and retained some possession that the difference between the sides was apparent. The visitors had much more of a cutting edge to their play than the home side who while their set piece was strong, lacked penetration against a well organised defence; Maidstone on the other hand even in these difficult conditions always looked threatening with the ball in hand, even deep in their own half and this was ably demonstrated after ten minutes as Neil Graves led the charge from his own 22m in a move that was only halted by a fumble well into the Sheppey half. It was from a poor clearance kick by Sheppey's Wardzynski from this attack that Sam Brill was able to run back at the defence, quick recycled ball through the hands of Willie Brown and Graves fed Mark Dorman on the left who beat the covering defenders to score under the posts.



This set the pattern of the game for the first half, with Sheppey working hard to retain possession and gain territory through their forwards with Maidstone's defence comfortably marshalling any threat. It wasn't until five minutes before the interval that the scoreboard



was next troubled as Wardzynski slotted a penalty from 25m out to make up for a missed attempt on the half hour. From the restart Maidstone applied pressure in the Sheppey 22m, with Matt Iles, Mark Dorman and Ben Williams all going close, a penalty saw Maidstone with a lineout just inside in the opposition 22m which Jack Lamb took and saw Matt Vickers touchdown after a 20m drive to the line, with Brown adding the extras Maidstone carried a 3-

14 advantage into the interval.

Playing with the elements three early tries from Maidstone, effectively secured the points within ten minutes of the restart. They applied pressure straight from the kick off, a sliced clearance gave them a lineout from which they were able to build several phases and some intelligent play by Dorman saw his angled run cut through the home defence to cross 5m in from the left touchline to extend the visitors lead.



The bonus point was secured inside the 5 minute mark, as from the restart they forced their way deep into the Sheppey half and with the home defence pressing hard some astute play by Brown saw an angled grubber kick from the edge of the 22m in behind the Sheppey defence with Brill following up to touch down. The last of the scoring came after Sheppey had worked hard to progress up the pitch in what was one of few forays they were able to mount into the Maidstone half, a piece of loose play gave Maidstone turnover ball and they drove at the heart of the Sheppey defence. The score came with a piece of intelligent attacking play as winger Jason Smith came off his wing at pace to receive a short pass and cut through the home defence close to the ruck and cross under the posts.



Whilst the scoreboard wasn't troubled again, the remainder of the match followed much the same vein, with a determined Sheppey side working hard to gain ground, but seldom clearing their own half whilst Maidstone continued to look for opportunities to move the ball through the hands and make penetrative runs.

In summary, this match was played in muddy & difficult conditions for running rugby; and whilst the error count was understandably high, it was Maidstone who took the risks and demonstrated a more creative and ultimately profitable approach to their play. The county town side put their league commitments to one side next week as they defend their Regional Senior Vase title against Cambridge club Cantabrigians.



Maidstone

Sam Bailey; Matt Vickers; Danny Baker; Andy Bacon; Lee Evans; Richard Parker; Josh Pankhurst; Matt Iles; Ivan Walkling; Willie Brown; James Davies; Neil Graves; Mark Dorman; Jason Smith; Sam Brill

Replacements (All used): Ben Williams; Jack Lamb; Dane Smith