



Match Report

League - London 3 South East

Pulborough 17 v Maidstone 36

Played at Pulborough, Saturday 23 February, 2013

With conditions verging toward the arctic, with a stiff breeze blowing straight down the pitch, Maidstone elected to play a complicated passing game against a Pulborough side they had already beaten twice this season. But a routine 36-17 victory hid a multitude of frustrations for the spectators and coaching staff, alike.



Coming off last week's large win against Park House, it could be argued that this match brought the teams feet down to earth, with a bump, and will refocus minds for future games. Let's hope so, because if they play like this again, the objectives for the year could disappear like a desert mirage.

But there were explanations for this below par performance. The starting line-up showed eight changes from the previous week and with Sam Brill nursing a sore hamstring and Neil Graves and James Davies unavailable, the threequarter line was particularly affected. Added to this, with Lee Evans starting from the bench, alongside Sam Bailey, the pack also lost some of its recent vibrancy.



But the problems really came from the mental approach to the game, perhaps not unsurprising after the large win the previous week. The determination to dominate the opposition seemed to be missing, while the wish to play intricate moves through the centre of the field rather than spread the ball quickly to the wings, played into the hands of a side that defended well throughout the game.

Indeed, if Maidstone needed any warnings that Pulborough were not going to lie down and allow them to play their own game, it came in the opening few minutes as the hosts attacked from the kick off and won a penalty in front of the posts, for entering the ruck from the side, which gave them an early lead.

Maidstone spent the opening period getting their limbs working to counter the wind chill but with a strong breeze behind them, they eschewed a kicking game that could have won them significant and easy yards and instead kept the ball in hand. With mounting pressure on the Pulborough line, Ben Williams scored Maidstone's first try, after ten minutes, bursting on to a pass from a tap penalty on the five metre line. With Willie Brown slotting the conversion, it seemed as though normal service had been resumed.





But with the scrum lacking power, Sam Bailey and Lee Evans were called off the bench, after the first quarter, and this provided more of the desired 'go-forward'. A second try, from another tap penalty, resulted shortly thereafter, this time Dan Eastwood getting the touchdown wide left, to widen the margin to nine points.

With the Pulborough No 8 yellow carded for failing to roll away, on the half hour, Maidstone took advantage of the extra man and, following a catch and drive from a line out, switched the point of attack for Jason Smith to cross the line to the left of the posts. Despite the agreement of both touch judges that the conversion had gone between the posts, the referee over-ruled them. There was some confusion as the ball had fallen off the tee as Willie Brown had started his kicking approach, and he quickly changed to drop goal stance. This may have altered the angle of trajectory of the ball sufficiently to justify the decision, but he was the only one in the ground that held this view.

A fourth try just before half time, secured the bonus point for Maidstone, with Jason Smith once again getting the touch down after a line out in the Pulborough 22. The straightforward conversion by Brown gave Maidstone a 24-3 cushion at the break with the hope that the visitors could use this platform to draw away in the second half.



But Pulborough started the second half the brighter of the sides and, with the wind behind them, gained early field position. Maidstone countered by running from deep positions with Lucian Morosan prominent from his new position at full back and drew first blood as the quarter hour approached, with Ben Williams latching on to a pass from a tap penalty to charge over half way out.



Pulborough then scored a try of their own, something no side has managed against the Maidstone defence, since mid-January, five games ago. And this stemmed from another mazy run by Morosan, from a deep position, after retrieving a Pulborough kick. His pass was correctly read by the Pulborough right wing, allowing him an open path to the try line and a score under the posts.

From the restart, a long kick by Pulborough was gathered by Sam Bailey and his run from the 22 set up a sweeping move down the field involving Mark Dorman, Ben Williams and Dorman again before he freed Matt Vickers to score under the posts, with the conversion a formality.

With both sides receiving yellow cards for technical offences, to reduce on field numbers to fourteen for the last ten minutes, Pulborough had the last word when their scrum half dived over a ruck, after a penalty on the five metre line, to give the home side a further seven points with five minutes to go.

With players and spectators, alike, craving the warmth of the pavilion, the referee elected to play no added time, leaving the final score at 36-17 to the visitors.



Maidstone

Ben Williams; Matt Vickers; Danny Baker: Alex Hadi; James Iles: Alex Sterzu; Josh Pankhurst; Matt Iles: Ivan Walkling; Willie Brown: Jack Naismith; Jason Smith; Mark Dorman; Dan Eastwood: Lucian Morosan

Replacements (All used): Sam Bailey; Lee Evans; Adrian Hogben