



Match Report

London Division 3(SE)

Maidstone 31 v Sheppey 14

Played at The Mote, Saturday 24 November, 2012

After last week's comfortable victory over Horsham, Maidstone were at The Mote for only their third home fixture so far in this season's league and cup campaigns and in a top of the table clash, were up against a Sheppey side that sat second in the table and looked like being very much leading contenders in this season's promotion battle. In a match that had long been identified as a key fixture in the league campaign, head coach Andy Foley had been quick to remind his squad to keep their focus and concentration if they were to secure a win that would see them maintain their unbeaten run and move clear at the head of the division.



The side was largely unchanged except for Jack Lamb coming in on the flank for the unavailable Paul Hyland, although a late injury withdrawal saw Dane Smith elevated to the starting line-up for Mark Dorman, with Jason Smith coming onto the bench alongside the fit again Nick Bunyan and versatile Mickael Majcher.



In greasy conditions where an expansive game was unlikely Sheppey were certainly up for this contest knowing that their strength lay in their pack of forwards. However, it was the home side that made the better start to the match and from the kick off they had Sheppey on the back foot and were two scores up inside the first 15 minutes. The first coming after five minutes when first Neil Graves and then Ben Williams ran the ball deep into the heart of the Sheppey defence

and with quick recycled ball they were able to score in the right corner through Lee Evans, with Sam Brill adding the extras from a difficult touchline conversion. The second came on the quarter hour mark when with their first meaningful period of possession Sheppey kicked the ball away; the home side moved the ball quickly to James Davies on the left wing who beat two defenders to touchdown with Brill on good form again adding the conversion. The end of the first quarter saw Sheppey's first points, which came from a misfielded kick on the Maidstone 22m; a penalty awarded from the resultant scrum gave kicker Charlie Wardzynski the opportunity to get the visitors on the scoreboard after an earlier failed long range attempt, which he duly took.





Maidstone were soon back on the attack and from a penalty on the Sheppey 22m forced a lineout on the opposition line, and whilst the throw didn't quite go to plan a defensive lapse by Sheppey saw skipper Williams waltz through a gaping hole to touchdown 15m to the right of the posts with Brill predictably adding the extra points. With Sheppey struggling to get out of their own half Maidstone were almost on the

scoreboard again when from a penalty in midfield they moved the ball quickly and only a last ditch tap tackle by Sheppey's covering fullback Lewis Frostick forced Davies into touch 5m short of the line. With Sheppey a man short through a yellow card Maidstone put pressure on the resulting Sheppey lineout eventually led to a penalty in front of the posts with Brill kicking the three points. An infringement in centerfield on the Maidstone 22m from the restart saw Sheppey's Wardzynski given the opportunity to reduce the deficit to take the home side into a 24-6 half-time lead.

Despite Maidstone playing with the slope in the second half it was Sheppey that started the half the brighter side, although with a strong set of forwards and reliable set piece game they lacked the ambition to move the ball wide allowing Maidstone's defence to contain any threat and it was almost fifteen minutes into the second half before a penalty on the Maidstone 22m gave Sheppey their first opportunity to post more points which Wardzynski gratefully accepted. As the game entered the final quarter Maidstone at last created some meaningful second half momentum to get into the Sheppey 22m and a quick tap penalty maintained the pressure on the Sheppey line through several phases before skipper Williams crossed to the right of the posts for the bonus point score with Brill again adding the extra points.



The game was largely now being played in midfield with Sheppey's narrow game unable to breach the home sides defence, as the match approached the last ten minutes, from a Sheppey foray into the home 22m, Maidstone were reduced to 14 men as Lucien Morosan was yellow carded after a series of penalty infringements by the team. With the home side reduced in numbers Sheppey opted for the scrum from the penalty and after a concerted effort they managed to get the ball wide for winger Chris Bain to cross in the right corner. Sheppey continued to exert pressure in the dying minutes of the game and Maidstone had skipper Williams consigned to the bin in the 5th minute of added time, although they managed to marshal their defence to close out the match without conceding further points.

In summary; and given the conditions, this top of the table clash was always going to be an 'arm wrestle' between the opposing packs. Both sides had solid set piece games but Sheppey employed a very narrow game plan and it was Maidstone's more dynamic penetrative forward approach and a willingness to spread the ball, combined with an organised defence that proved the difference between the sides.

The county town side are in RFU Senior Vase action next week as they travel to Hertfordshire to take on L3NW club Hitchin.

Maidstone

Ben Williams; Sam Bailey; Danny Baker: James Iles; Lee Evans: Richard Parker; Jack lamb;
Matt Iles: Ivan Walkling; Willie Brown: James Davies; Neil Graves; Dane Smith; Lucien
Morosan: Sam Brill

Replacements (all used): Jason Smith; Nick Bunyan; Mickael Majcher