



## Match Report

RFU Senior Vase National Semi-Final

Maidstone FC 6 v Drybrook RFC 16

Played at The Mote, Saturday 30th March, 2013

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Maidstone's ambition of reaching the final of this competition, to be played at Twickenham, crashed to earth on Saturday when they came up against the Gloucester club, Drybrook, in this national semi-final. The final score, 16-6, just about reflected the play but it was the superior tactical nous of the visitors that swung the balance.



In front of a large crowd that lined both touch lines, with a good proportion supporting Drybrook, a village team from the Forest of Dean, playing in the Gloucester Premier league, the game was played on ground conditions that were unimaginable even a week ago. Gone was the cloying mud, replaced by a firm surface with a good grass cover, designed for fast open rugby. Only the biting north-east wind reminded everyone of the long fingers of winter keeping spring at bay.

In the post-game discussions, when searching for reasons for this first defeat of the season, a number of theories were put forward: not enough hard games this season? not taking kickable penalties? tactical naivety? But in truth, the difference between the sides was marginal: Drybrook excelled in the catch and drive from the line out and Maidstone never found a convincing means of stopping it. Add to this the failure of the, mainly, three quarters to convert golden opportunities into tries and the summary is complete.

Only when Adrian Hogben replaced Ivan Walking at scrum half did Maidstone make any attempt to use the boot to gain field position. At all other times, they fell back on the ability to run the ball past the opposition, which, in this case, came up with a cast iron defence.

Maidstone fielded their strongest starting line up with Paul Hyland returning after an ankle injury, at openside, and Jason Smith claiming the right wing slot in place of the injured James Davies. But with a settled team that should have delivered a strong opening, it was clear, from the start, that they were nervous and this led to errors.



An early penalty, for not rolling away after the tackle, saw Drybrook put the ball into the Maidstone half and then demonstrate their most potent weapon, the catch and drive from the line out, taking them down to the Maidstone five metre line. Spirited Maidstone defence kept this



thrust at bay, but a second penalty, on twelve minutes, 30 metres out, just left of the posts, saw Drybrook move ahead when it was converted by full back, Treherne.

It was only with the quarter approaching that Maidstone began to lose their nervy look and begin to impose themselves on the play. A series of moves drove the play down to the Drybrook line and with a yellow card issued to a Drybrook forward for killing the ball, Maidstone began to show their pedigree. Eschewing the easy three points for a tap penalty, No 8, Matt Iles crossed between the posts only for the referee to decree crossing and a penalty to the visitors.

Two minutes later, Olly Newton pierced the Drybrook defence and crossed the line, only to have the ball knocked from his grasp in the act of scoring. Five minutes later, another Maidstone assault on the Drybrook line was thwarted when the ball carrier was held up over the visitors try line. A further attempt on the Drybrook line saw Willie Brown tackled inches short, just before the half hour.

A sweeping Maidstone move that started inside their 22, showed the pace of the Maidstone backs but the Drybrook defence was up to the challenge and when the inside pass went astray, they showed their countering ability. By this stage, Maidstone knew they were in a battle.

The first half finished with no further score, leaving all to play for in the second half. But with Ivan Walking in the sin bin after a penalty offence in the Maidstone 22, everyone knew a supreme effort would be required.

Drybrook had considered themselves the underdogs for this game but after their strong first half they started the second period with their tails up, taking the play to Maidstone from the restart. It was Maidstone that were first on the scoreboard after twelve minutes, however. Having seen an earlier penalty attempt drift just wide, Sam Brill made no mistakes with the second, just left of the posts and thirty metres out.



With parity restored, the home crowd was looking to see Maidstone kick-on but it was Drybrook that came back hardest. A penalty, in front of the posts, saw Treherne put the visitors back in front on the quarter hour.

A gliding run by Willie Brown, that looked to have the makings of a score, was thwarted when he slipped, with men outside him, but it was the more ruthless Drybrook eight that manufactured the next score with another catch and drive. It wasn't pretty but it was effective, with No 8, Chesters, getting the touch down out wide after twenty five minutes, to open an eight point gap.

Maidstone hit back on the half hour, with another Brill penalty but, despite all their hard work, they just couldn't find the right combination to pierce the visitors' defence. And Drybrook had the last word when, from a line out in the Maidstone 22, Drybrook stole the ball on the Maidstone throw in and executed a final catch and drive to the line. This time it was openside, Price who got the score that drove the final nail in the Maidstone coffin.

The level of disappointment in the Maidstone ranks was palpable. But the lessons are clear for the future namely, that a greater degree of sophistication in the game plan is required when the opposition manages to contain the running game that is this side's first option. Drybrook demonstrated firstly that technique can overcome size and secondly that finding the opposition's weak spot can lead to success.

### **Maidstone**

Ben Williams; Sam Bailey; Danny Baker; James Iles; Lee Evans; Richard Parker; Paul Hyland; Matt Iles; Ivan Walking; Willie Brown; Jason Smith; Neil Graves; Mark Dorman; Olly Newton; Sam Brill

Replacements (All used): Matt Vikers; Martin Maytum; Nick Bunyan; Jack Lamb; Josh Pankhurst; Adrian Hogben; Gareth Bramwell

