



## Match Report



London & SE Division 1 (South)

Chichester RFC 44 - Maidstone FC 26

Played at Oaklands Park, Chichester, Saturday 2 December 2017

With six changes to the side that got back to winning ways, last week, Maidstone travelled to high-flying Chichester with a degree of trepidation. While the game resulted in a 44-26 loss, this was no one-sided affair and the hosts realised they had been in a hard-fought battle at the final whistle.

The bonus for Maidstone was the point achieved for scoring four tries, all down to the efforts of the pack and their implementation of the catch and drive ploy from line outs. But the disparity between the sides was the cutting edge displayed by the Chichester back line, which was far sharper in attack than Maidstone, looking like they could score at will whenever Maidstone's defence faltered.

With Josh Pankhurst joining the long-term injured after last week's game, Gary Beck slotted, seamlessly, into the front row while Charlie Williams and Rob Field replaced the unavailable Ben Massey and Seth Waterhouse in the second and back rows. The back line also had three changes, with Matt Moore and Alex Clarke on the wings with Rory Beech returning to the inside centre role.

The game started in ominous fashion for the Maidstone travelling support, with two tries conceded in the first ten minutes to fast-starting Chichester. Outside centre, Sam Renwick was at the heart of both scores, completing the first in the left corner and making the decisive break for the second, before feeding the ball on for winger, Hopkins, to complete the move under the posts.

The simple conversion for full back, Hopkins, put the hosts in a 12-0 lead and alarm bells began to ring. But with the hosts getting on the wrong side of the referee at the breakdown, a series of penalties gave Maidstone the opportunity to get back into the game and they took full advantage.

The first was a penalty try following two penalties against the Chichester pack. The catch and drive from the second line out rolled ominously to the line and, with Chichester collapsing the maul, a penalty try was awarded, along with a yellow card to second row, Lindsay. The second try, three minutes later, came following a penalty for holding on after a tackle. With the line out deep in the Chichester 22, Ben Williams was on hand to complete the catch and drive, this time.

Ryan Copp's conversion put Maidstone into a two point lead and this was extended further at the end of the first quarter, when a third catch and drive move took play to the Chichester line before the ball was fed to Rory Beech, to score half way out. A second conversion, by Copp, put Maidstone into a 21-12 lead.

But with the hosts returning to their full complement, the momentum shifted, and the second quarter of the match belonged firmly to Chichester. Just before the half hour, a penalty allowed them position deep in the Maidstone 22. While the catch and drive was halted efficiently, once the ball was released to the backs, Maidstone's cover was breached, initially by Renwick, stretching the defence, allowing wing, Margason to score wide on the left.

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A fine conversion brought the scores back to within two points and this was turned into a lead shortly thereafter when Maidstone were penalised for a high tackle in front of their own posts and Hutchin popped the kick over. But the yellow card incurred by Adam Knight in the lead up depleted the Maidstone defensive effort and gave the hosts the opportunity to dominate, once more. The second yellow card to full back, Leech, for the high tackle, gave Chichester even more freedom to dominate through their back line and they took full advantage.

A try by Chichester skipper, Bentall, advanced the score to 27-21 and, just before the break, another fine run by centre, Renwick, took play deep into the Maidstone 22, before the ball was recycled for wing forward, O'Callaghan to score, to put the hosts firmly in command.

Another fast start to the second half saw Chichester further increase their lead. A bull-ocking run by No 8. Johnson, took play deep into the Maidstone 22. While he was brought down before the line, quick recycling by the hosts saw him on hand to complete the move under the posts, allowing a simple conversion and a 39-21 scoreline.

Once again, Maidstone looked to be heading for a heavy defeat. But digging deep into their resources and led by skipper, Ben Williams, they were next to score. The forwards were in the forefront, again, following a line out on the Chichester 22. Gary Beck slipped through the home defence to take play down to the five-metre line and, following an inside pass by Morosan, Ben Williams made the line, through heavy Chichester traffic. And the 39-26 scoreline held until the last minute of added time, reflecting Maidstone's solid defensive effort throughout.

The final score came from a line out, just in the Maidstone half. Once again, Renwick made the decisive break for the hosts to take play into Maidstone's right corner. The recycled ball was then swept left for hooker, Belcher, to score in the left corner, having stretched tired Maidstone legs to the limit.

While this was another defeat for Maidstone, there was much pride to be taken from the display, particularly for the pack, who led the defence and attack all afternoon.

Ben Williams; Gary Beck; Tom Mount: Adam Knight; Charlie Williams: Ben Knight; Lewis Stimpson; Rob Field: Lucian Morosan; Ryan Copp: Matt Moore; Rory Beech; George Perry; Alex Clark: Jack Leech

Replacements: Kieran Gibbons; Jack Bramhall; Euan Caborn (All used)

