



Match Report



London & SE Division 1 (South)

Gravesend RFC 26 - Maidstone FC 37

Played at The Rectory Field, Gravesend, Saturday 03 February 2018

This was a pulsating match between 2 sides at the bottom of the league in a game that Maidstone thoroughly deserved to win and resulted in the two sides exchanging places at the foot of the table. Having come so close last week and a run of 7 losses on the bounce, this was an encounter that will give the county town a great deal of confidence and all credit should go to the players and coaching staff for putting in this performance given recent defectors and side-line injuries.

Bolstered by the return of Matt Iles and the pairing of Webb and Oram in the centre, plus some bite at the back and a captain leading by example (not to mention a Danny Baker cameo), this showed the potential of a galvanised Maidstone side. Probably too late to affect the inevitable outcome of the league campaign but don't be surprised if this resurgent group of players don't take some scalps on the way – if injuries picked up during the match are not too serious.

Under grey skies and persistent drizzle, this was a high scoring encounter that produced some well taken tries by both sides resulting in 5 points for Maidstone and a bonus point for Gravesend. It was Gravesend, however, who started the sharper with Maidstone spending much of the first 10 minutes repelling attacks and trying to find some rhythm. The pressure exerted by Gravesend resulted in a line-out catch and drive on the 10m line and with recycled ball and slick handling allowed the winger to cut in under the posts for a converted try. With Maidstone still not getting their game together, this looked an ominous sign, however, a break from Craig Webb and a grubber kick was gathered by the Gravesend defence but the clearance kick was smothered by the advancing Jack Leech, who fortuitously held onto the ball to score. With the conversion missed, the score was 5-7 after 20 minutes and at last Maidstone were beginning to find some fluency to their game.

From the next play, a high kick from Rory Beech, (who controlled things well all afternoon at 10) landed and wrong-footed the Gravesend defence for the Maidstone attack line to pounce on the ball and feed hooker, Max Guerro to score under the posts, with the conversion putting Maidstone in the lead at 7-12.

The next score came from a line-out on the opposition 10m line following a penalty kick that was collectively driven over by the forwards for captain, Adam Knight to get the touch down in the left hand corner. The conversion was missed to bring the score to 7-17. An injury to Ben Knight brought on replacement, Jack Bramwell on the 30 minute mark and a period of 'nip and tuck' rugby from both sides, finished the half without any further scores.

After the break, a further injury to centre, Ed Oram, to be replaced by George Perry and the inclusion of Danny Baker led to a re-shuffled back-row with Matt Isles taking up his familiar centre birth. Gravesend with their tails up, sustained pressure in the Maidstone 22 and a catch and drive from the line-out led to the first score of the second half. With the successful conversion to follow, Gravesend were back into the game at 14-17.





Maidstone, were quick to respond from a turn-over initiated by Danny Baker that gave Maidstone a penalty that was kicked into the corner. The resultant catch and drive was initially repelled but quick ball from the breakdown allowed Lewis Stimpson to sprint to the corner, only to be thwarted by a high covering tackle, which resulted in Maidstone being awarded a penalty try to bring the score 14-24 and the 4 try bonus point. A subsequent penalty awarded to Maidstone after some sustained pressure extended the lead to 14-27.

Gravesend were now playing catch-up and entered their best phase of the game. A counter-attack from deep in their own half and a kick over the top turned the Maidstone defence and allowed the winger to get the finger-tip touch down in the left corner. The converted try narrowed the score to 21-27, with a good 20 minutes left to play. A long-range penalty was then awarded to Maidstone, which Rory Beech slotted between the uprights to give Maidstone an 9 point advantage at 21-30.

The next score came from a free-kick at the scrum, which was quickly fed through the hands to allow, Man of the Match, Jack Leech to get his second try of the afternoon and with the successful conversion the score-line was now 21-37.

Undeterred, Gravesend continued to exert pressure through a series of 'pick and goes' in the Maidstone half that resulted in the Gravesend 9, scoring in the left hand corner. The conversion looked true but cannoned off the cross bar to deny Gravesend the extras. With the score-line at 26-37, Maidstone only needed to keep possession to close out the game but rather than slow it down, Maidstone became more frenetic and made a number of unforced errors to give the ball back to Gravesend. However, with Gravesend unable to break out of their 22, Maidstone finished resolutely and a collective sigh of relief could be heard, when the final whistle went from both the players and the coaching staff.

It is a real shame that Maidstone are finally getting their game together with so much of the season gone but with the solid foundation that is now being built, Maidstone should look forward to more success regardless of which league they end up playing in next season.

A final note goes to Gravesend, for their dogged performance and 'never say die' attitude and who were magnanimous in defeat and took time, particularly their No 10 to congratulate all Maidstone staff in what was a hard fought but deserving win between 2 sides who look likely to do battle once again next season in a different division.

Team

Kieron Gibbens; Max Guerro; Steve Goode; Adam Knight; Ben Massey, Ben Knight; Lewis Stimpson Matt Isles; ; Lucian Morosan; Rory Beech; Vaki Antoniou; Ed Oram; Craig Webb; Sam Pearson; Jack Leach

Replacements: Danny Baker; Jack Bramwell, George Perry (all used)

