



Match Report



London & SE Division 1 (South)

Tottonians RFC 24 - Maidstone FC 12

Played at Water Lane, Totton, Saturday 6 January 2018

This was another of those frustrating matches that Maidstone could, and should, have won. To come away with nothing but a 24-12 defeat, with even a losing bonus point snatched from their grasp at the end, was frustrating for everyone but summed up the season, to date.

The pack dominated throughout but the failure to turn field position into points, particularly in the first half, summed up the differences between the sides. At no time did Maidstone look like they could outpace the home side, whereas Tottonians, in contrast, could always rely on their three-quarter line to find the gap and penetrate Maidstone's back-field.

With Ben Williams and Seth Waterworth unavailable, due to work commitments, Max Guero stepped up to start in the front row and Charlie Williams came into the back row, with Ben Knight moving to No. 8. The rest of the side was unchanged from the last game against Sevenoaks, before Christmas.

The game was played on a heavy pitch which had taken a lot of rain in the last few days. Despite this, it was clear that Tottonians would look to their back line for advantage and this came after only 12 minutes. A break in the centre by Buck, with Maidstone sliding off the tackle, was enough for the home side to take the lead, with fly half, Searle, adding the conversion.

Maidstone looked to get into the game through their forwards but too many mistakes prevented them from exerting sustained pressure and it was the home side that increased their lead after 25 minutes. Slick inter-passing by the Tottonians back line, led by fly half, Searle, saw them work an opening on the right which was finished off by wing forward, Durnin. Another straightforward conversion by Searle increased Tottonian's lead to fourteen points.

For the subsequent fifteen minutes of the half, Maidstone suddenly found themselves in control. A break by Matt Iles in the centre, taken on by Guero and Ben Massey, took the visitors deep into the Tottonian's 22. A last-ditch effort by full back, Raqio, killed the ball and earned him a yellow card but Maidstone continued to press through a series of penalties and scrums. Despite their efforts, they couldn't find the gap in the Tottonians defence to get them over the line and when they kicked for goal, Rory Beech's effort slipped past the post. With hindsight, this failure to get points on the board, in the first half, ultimately proved decisive.

At half time, Coach Hebden rejigged the back line with Jack Leech moving to scrum half, Morosan moving on to the left wing and Alex Clark coming on for Antoniou. This allowed Maidstone's point of attack to change and some long, raking grubber kicks from Leech gave them good field position on a number of occasions.

After regaining the ball from kick off, Maidstone quickly established themselves deep in the Tottonians 22. Some powerful scrummaging saw another yellow card issued to Tottonians, this time to second row Ramus for pulling down the maul. Immediately

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thereafter, a catch and drive move saw Charlie Williams on hand to touch down in the corner, with only five minutes on the clock.

A fine conversion by Rory Beech halved the deficit and Maidstone continued to pressurise the home defence, causing them to make mistakes as they looked to run and pass from poor positions. A searching kick from Leech, deep into the Tottonians 22, forced their full back to take the ball into touch and from the subsequent line out, Maidstone set up a series of scrums on the five metre line.

Another Tottonians yellow card, this time issued to No. 8, Williams, for handling in the scrum was the prelude for Maidstone's second try, a push over, secured by Ben Knight. Unfortunately, the conversion was missed but Maidstone were on top and Tottonians were showing signs of frailty with 25 minutes left on the clock.

An over cooked restart kick allowed Maidstone a scrum back on half way, but as Tottonians regained a full complement, they weathered the storm without conceding further points. Maidstone continued to attack, led by some probing runs by Lewis Stimpson, in the forwards and by Matt Iles, in the centre, but the vital break eluded them and Tottonians defence held.

With the forty minutes mark approaching, a penalty conceded by Maidstone on their own 22 was converted by Searle to extend Tottonians lead to 17-12. As Maidstone scrum weakened, so the home side came back into the game, playing off the front foot once more and allowing their outsiders to find space.

A last ditch catch and drive move by Maidstone in the home side's 22 came to naught and when the ball was lost, Tottonians swept upfield to establish their own attacking base in Maidstone's 22. A tiring defence repelled the Tottonians' first attack on the line but with the ball switching to the right, fly half Searle, set up Durnin, for his second try of the game. Another fine conversion from the touchline added insult to Maidstone's injury, as any notion of a losing bonus reward disappeared from the game.

Maidstone's dominance through their pack, once again went unrewarded but until they can find more pace and guile in the three-quarter line, to generate another point of attack and finish off the hard work of the front eight, the story of frustration is likely to continue.

Maidstone

Kieran Gibbons; Gary Beck; Max Guero: Adam Knight; Ben Massey; Charlie Williams; Lewis Stimpson; Ben Knight: Lucian Morosan; Rory Beech: Vaki Antoniou; Matt Iles; George Perry; Sean Woolford: Jack Leech

Replacements: Jack Bramwell; Joe Stevenson; Alex Clark (All used)

