



## Match Report



London & SE Division 1 (South)

London Cornish RFC 30 - Maidstone FC 15

Played at Roehampton Vale, Saturday 11 November 2017

This was Maidstone's first ever encounter with London Cornish and, with the form book favouring the South London side, there was a degree of trepidation in the air when this game kicked off on a wet pitch under overcast skies. While the final score of 30-15 did nothing to lift the gloom for the visitors, there were some positives to take from the game.

For starters, the Cornish back line had pace and power, particularly the back three, but with Craig Webb back in the centre, Maidstone had their own point of attack, which allowed them to break the gain line on numerous occasions. Secondly, the pack, with three changes from last week fronted up well against a heavy opposing eight and consistently made good yardage in the loose.

But perhaps most impressively, the team played at a pace that stretched the opposition, particularly in the second half. Unfortunately, the missing piece of the jigsaw was the ability to maintain this pace throughout the eighty minutes.

The starting fifteen, once again, showed changes. Charlie Williams stepped into the second row to replace the unavailable Rob Field, while Matt Iles reverted to his No 8 role and Gary Beck returned to the front row. Craig Webb came into the centre to replace the injured Rory Beech, while George Perry returned to partner him, with Vaki Antiniou starting on the wing.

Sam Pearson made his first appearance this season, on the bench and was joined by Joe Stephenson for his debut.

Early penalties to London Cornish allowed them to play on the front foot and led to their first score after seven minutes. A line out in the Maidstone 22 saw quick ball to the back line release the centre, who fed his wing, with fast moving full back, Smith, outside him, to score in the left corner.

A second score followed just before the quarter hour. This time it was the power and quick feet of right wing, Kolapo-Ajala, that outdid the Maidstone defence on the half way line. Three missed tackles were ultimately responsible for his try but he proved a handful for the Maidstone defence all afternoon. With fly half, Kimmins, adding the conversion, Cornish cruised into a 12-0 lead.

But Maidstone had already demonstrated that they could create problems of their own with a multi-phase passage of play that stretched the Cornish defence, until a handling error relieved the pressure. More of the same ultimately gave Maidstone the chance to get on the board, when Caborn slotted a 35 metre penalty after a high tackle.

But with Maidstone's line-out insecure, a number of attacking positions were relinquished when they failed to find a jumper, letting the opposition recover, when points were again a possibility.

The final play of the half, following a spell of Cornish pressure, was a penalty on the Maidstone 22, which Kimmins converted to nudge the home side to a 15-3 half-time

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lead. Coach Hebden decided to rejig the back line after the break, with Matt Iles moving into the centre, Sam Pearson on to the wing and Joe Stephenson into the back row.

An early penalty, for hands in the ruck, allowed Cornish to stretch the lead to 18-3 with only two minutes gone and, once again, Maidstone looked down the barrel of a heavy defeat. Instead, they rose to the challenge and coming back strongly.

Under pressure and with a greasy ball, Cornish started to make mistakes, allowing Maidstone back into the game. From a penalty on half way, the visitors established a line out in the Cornish 22 and, while the first throw in didn't go to hand, a second attempt, immediately thereafter, did and Matt Iles found a gap in the centre to power over under the posts. Caborn's conversion was a formality, reducing the deficit to 18-10.

Was another come back, to match the pattern of play of previous weeks possible? In this case, there was a negative answer as Cornish found sufficient cohesion in their back line to breach the Maidstone defence to put Smith over in the corner. With a fine conversion from the touchline by Kimmins, the hosts stretched their lead to 25-10, with twenty minutes gone.

Maidstone continued to pressure the Cornish defence, but a scoring opportunity was spilt just past the half hour and with full time approaching, Cornish put the final nail in Maidstone's coffin. Another break in the centre took play to the Maidstone line and a fine tackle seemed to have halted the attack but quick reactions by Kolapo-Ajala, allowed him to seize the loose ball and fall over the line.

Maidstone had the consolation of the last score, in injury time, when a catch and drive allowed Gary Beck to touch down to bring the final deficit back to 30-15.

The last four games against opposition, mainly from the bottom end of the table, have demonstrated that Maidstone are missing a key ingredient in their game. While injuries and suspensions have robbed them of key players, they seem to have lost the ability to get into a winning position and then manage the game sufficiently well to come out on top. Unless this ingredient is found, and swiftly, this is going to be a long and fruitless season.

Kieron Gibbons; Gary Beck; Max Guero: Charlie Williams; Ben Massey: Ben Knight; Lewis Stimpson; Matt Iles: Lucian Morosan; Euan Caborn: Alex Clark; Craig Webb; George Perry; Vaki Antiniou: Jack Leech

Replacements: Ryan Murphy; Sam Pearson; Joe Stephenson (All used)

