



Match Report



London & SE Division 1 (South)

Maidstone FC 14 v Havant RFC 30

Played at The Mote, Saturday 13th January 2018

Maidstone hosted high-flying Havant for their return fixture, at The Mote, on Saturday. After a high-scoring, fluctuating game on the south coast, earlier in the season, expectations for an entertaining second encounter were high but tempered by current form. As it turned out, the 14-30 defeat was a reflection of the current improvement in the Maidstone side and, once again, it was the forwards that led the way.

With Jack Leech retaining the scrum half position after his encouraging display in the second half of last week's game, the only changes in the back line were the return of Craig Webb in the centre, to partner Matt Iles, and Sam Pearson at full back. In the scrum, Jack Bramwell came in at blind side after some encouraging performances off the bench.

On a cold but still afternoon, with the pitch heavy underfoot, Maidstone started slowly and conceded the initiative to the visitors with a penalty, on their own 22, within a minute of the start, which fly half Knight accepted with alacrity to put Havant in front.

A series of Maidstone penalties compounded the poor start and the visitors extended their lead on ten minutes with a well worked try by right wing, Carr. The move was set up by a catch and drive to the left corner, which Maidstone held up over the line but, from the subsequent scrum, the ball was moved quickly to the right and a miss pass from the fly half put the wing into space.

Maidstone continued to give away penalties which culminated in Ben Knight receiving a yellow card just before the end of the quarter. But with an increase in energy and engagement, Maidstone began to mount pressure on the Havant defence and it was an error in the visitors' half, at a Maidstone line out, that allowed the visitors to score again.

With the ball loose, Havant reacted more quickly, transferring it to the threequarters to release centre Morris to score. With Knight missing the conversion, the margin extended to thirteen points.

But suddenly, it was Maidstone applying the pressure to the Havant line. A quick tap penalty was followed by a second to touch, deep in the Havant 22, with the subsequent catch and drive held. But the building pressure told, with flanker, Goldring, receiving a yellow card for a high tackle, on the half hour.

With Maidstone's forwards on top, the pressure on the Havant defence continued to mount and with forty minutes on the clock, the visitors finally were breached. A break by Matt Iles was finished off by Craig Webb in the corner and a fine conversion by Rory Beech cut the deficit to 7-13.

A conceded penalty at the restart gave Havant the opportunity to mount one last attack and a catch and drive, to the corner, was enough to set up their third try and an eleven point half-time lead.

Havant's fast start to the second half was ably countered by the hosts but lack of cohe-

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sion in the Maidstone three-quarter line threw away the advantage too often. A missed line out in the visitors' 22 was one such occasion. From the subsequent scrum, Havant breached the home defence and set up hooker, Trail, to score at the opposite end. With Knight converting, the lead extended to 25-7 and all the hard work by Maidstone seemed lost.

But just before the end of the third quarter, Maidstone scored again. After a spell of pressure that took them into the visitors' 22, a quick tap penalty by Craig Webb to Rory Beech caught the defence flatfooted and gave Lewis Stimpson the room to cross the line half way out. The straightforward conversion by Beech saw the deficit reduced to 14-25 and dreams of a comeback were raised.

But despite the pressure that the Maidstone forwards mounted on their opposing eight, basic errors continued to undo the good work. One break by the Havant back line went from their own line to deep into the Maidstone half and this came from a Maidstone line out.

The final score of the game came at the end of the third quarter. A clearing kick by Maidstone failed to find touch and a counter started by the Havant right wing was taken on by the full back to release hooker, Trail, to score his second try of the afternoon, in the corner.

Maidstone tried everything to score again but Havant dominated field position and contained the play in the Maidstone half. A late entry into the game by Danny Baker added extra scrummaging power to the Maidstone eight and this made the last period uncomfortable for Havant but the extra class of the visitors deservedly held sway.

Maidstone continued to show improved form in this game but, once again, the cutting edge to finish off the hard work of the forwards, was missing.

Maidstone

Kieran Gibbons; Gary Beck; Max Guero: Adam Knight; Ben Massey: Jack Bramwell; Lewis Stimpson; Ben Knight: Jack Leech; Rory Beech: Vaki Antoniou; Matt Iles; Craig Webb; Lucian Morosan: Sam Pearson

Replacements: Danny Baker; Joe Stevenson; Shaun Woolford (All used)

