



Match Report



London & SE Division 1 (South)

Maidstone FC 31 v Sevenoaks RFC 34

Played at The Mote, Saturday 16th December, 2017



Starting the second half of the season with a game against local rivals, Sevenoaks, should have been the incentive Maidstone required to begin the process of climbing back up the table. That they played well enough to achieve this will make the 31-34 defeat even more galling and leaves them contemplating an exit from this league, at season's end.

The fire burnt bright enough in the team and the effort expended should have been sufficient to take them over the line, but familiar failings let them down. Until they can cut out the yellow cards and a high penalty count, they will continue to cede control, and the initiative, to the opposition, at crucial times.

Added to this, the lack of penetration in the back line, heaps too much focus on the forwards to carry the fight to the opposition, allowing opponents to focus their defence around the pack, rather than out wide, where it is easier to find space.

With Gary Beck picking up a leg injury last week, Ryan Murphy came into the front row, at hooker, for his second game at this level. The back row required a rejig, as well. With Lewis Stimpson unavailable, Ben Knight moved to openside, Charlie Williams took up the blind side spot, and Seth Waterworth returned at No 8, allowing Matt Iles to continue in the inside centre role. Rory Beech was preferred to Ryan Copp at fly half, who dropped to the bench.



Maidstone started the game brightly taking play into the Sevenoaks 22 after the visitors conceded an early penalty.

While the subsequent catch and drive was held up, a second penalty, in front of the posts was converted by Beech for an early lead.

With the referee insisting on a correct bind process at the scrum, a series of free kicks and penalties broke up the play. But once Sevenoaks found their feet, their slick han-





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dling and passing began to stretch the Maidstone defence.

The visitors levelled the score at the end of the first quarter, after Maidstone conceded another penalty, with fly half, Fotheringham, converting. But more seriously, a yellow card for prop, Kieron Gibbons, reduced the home side's complement. Whether this was

responsible for the subsequent try by Sevenoaks is hard to say, because it came from an interception in the visitors 22, but it increased the pressure on the Maidstone defence, with long-term implications.

Hooker, Sedgwick, began the process by reading a Maidstone attack and catching the ball that could otherwise have resulted in a Maidstone try, to take play deep into the home 22. While he was brought down, winger, Glynn, was on hand to complete the process, touching down under the posts. With the easy conversion, Sevenoaks opened up a seven-point lead.

The final score of the half extended the visitors lead, deep into added time. A kick over the top from the Maidstone scrum half, was run back by Sevenoaks and a deft grubber kick into the corner was touched by Maidstone, giving Sevenoaks a line-out, five metres from the try line. The subsequent catch and drive was effective and, with Fotheringham slotting the conversion, Sevenoaks went into the break with a 17-3 advantage.



Maidstone started the second half as if their lives depended on it, which, in many ways, it did. Matt Iles made a decisive break in the centre, shortly after the restart, and eventually finished off the move to score by the posts. With an easy conversion for Beech, Maidstone were back in the game at 10-17, with a couple of minutes on the clock.

Scoreline parity was restored before the ten-minute mark when a high tackle was punished with a penalty, allowing Maidstone a line-out in the Sevenoaks 22. With the catch and drive working efficiently and Rory Beech converting from the touchline, Maidstone's tails were up and Sevenoaks were looking fragile.

But another Maidstone penalty, this time for a high tackle, just past the quarter hour, allowed the visitors the scope to take play into the Maidstone 22 and, while their initial options were thwarted by solid defence, they eventually found space to put blind side flanker, Suttie, over in the left corner. Another fine conversion by Fotheringham took the Sevenoaks lead back to seven points.

It was now Maidstone's turn to fight back. A penetrating kick to the right corner by full back, Leech, took play deep into Sevenoaks territory. After an initial clearance by the visitors' defence, a second line out for Maidstone provided the platform to attack through the



forwards, with Ben Williams eventually getting the touch down in the left corner. With Rory Beech confirming he had found his kicking boots, the conversion levelled the scores once more.

Sevenoaks got their noses in front just past the half hour with a straightforward, Fotheringham, penalty. More seriously, the yellow card awarded for a no-arms tackle, on Ben Knight, appeared to condemn Maidstone to defeat, consolidated when Sevenoaks scored another try with five minutes of lapsed time remaining.



Full back, Short, was the scorer, this time after play was switched from the right to left, coming into the line to take the scoring pass. Fotheringham's conversion extended the lead to ten points and all seemed up for Maidstone. But with the referee adding fifteen minutes for all the stoppages for injured Sevenoaks players, there was still all to play for, especially after Maidstone got themselves back on the board after two minutes of added time.

The catch and drive was, once again, the starting point for the score. With the initial thrust held on the line, a second attempt saw Charlie Williams skip through a gap to score half way out. Once again, Rory Beech added the conversion, to complete a 100% success rate for both kickers and bring the margin down to three points.

Try as they might, Maidstone couldn't find a way through to the winning score, even with the visitors reduced to thirteen men, after the award of two yellow cards to Sevenoaks, as they consistently offended in defence.

In summary a galling defeat for Maidstone but the areas for improvement are clear if such defeats are not to be repeated.

Maidstone

Ben Williams; Ryan Murphy; Kieran Gibbons: Adam Knight; Ben Massey: Charlie Williams; Ben Knight; Seth Waterworth: Lucian Morosan; Rory Beech: Vaki Antoniou; Matt Iles; George Perry; Sean Woolford: Jack Leech

Replacements: Max Guero; Jack Bramwell; Ryan Copp (All used)

