



# Match Report



## London & SE Division 1 (South)

Maidstone FC 40 v Thurrock RFC 22

Played at The Mote, Saturday 17th February, 2018

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A classic Danny Baker try sealed this victory over fellow strugglers, Thurrock, late in the second half. What it lacked in speed was compensated in impact as it took Maidstone two scores clear with the clock ticking down to full time. A superbly cut line by winger, Vaki Antoniou, five minutes later, was the icing on the cake, ensuring Maidstone rode out injury time with a smile on their faces and a 40-22 margin in their pockets.

Under a cloudless blue sky, with no wind, but on a sanded pitch to counter some of its heaviness after the recent rain, Maidstone hosted fellow strugglers, Thurrock, from Essex. Both sides had wins under their belts from their last outings, two weeks previously, with high hopes and expectations of adding to their current form.

The game at Thurrock, earlier in the season, had been a close encounter with the hosts coming out on top by a nine-point margin. But with Maidstone's recent form showing a distinct upward trend, despite some key personnel changes, expectation of a second win in succession was uppermost in the minds of home spectators. And the team didn't disappoint.

With Keiron Gibbons having to return home, to New Zealand, due to a family bereavement, Danny Baker stepped into the front row breach, with Ryan Murphy on the bench, as front row cover. Jack Bramwell continued at blind side, with Ben Knight still nursing a twisted ankle, in an otherwise unchanged pack.



In the back line, Jack Leech and Lucian Morosan swapped places, while George Perry came in at outside centre, with Craig Webb moving inside.

The game started at pace with both sides looking to kick for territory through their scrum halves. But it was a break by Maidstone's man-of-the-match, Matt Iles, that led to the first score. Taking the play deep into the Thurrock 22, it set the perfect platform



field, with an outside break, leaving Barrand an easy conversion and the visitors with their noses in front.

Maidstone regained the lead on the quarter hour with a second try. After a penalty allowed the hosts to set up a catch and drive, it looked like the opportunity had gone when the throw-in missed the jumper. But a knock-on by Thurrock allowed Maidstone the scrum with Jack Leech feeding centre, George Perry, to score by the posts, giving Rory Beech the simplest of conversions.

The lead was extended to 15-7, five minutes later, when Thurrock were penalised for not rolling away. Beech stroked the 35-metre kick through the posts with composure.

After a scrappy spell of play, with both sides failing to impress themselves on the other, a fine move by the visitors' back line cut the deficit to one point. From a line out just in



the Maidstone half, the ball was moved along the Thurrock line with winger, Farrell, released into space. He still had plenty to do but rode a final, covering tackle to score half way out, with Barrand adding the conversion.

visitors. Gary Beck got the touchdown and Rory Beech added the conversion to bring the half-time score to 22-14.

Maidstone almost scored once more after a fine break by full back, Sam Pearson. But the catch and drive didn't work this time, although the yellow card incurred by Thurrock centre, Gay, in stopping the attack, illustrated the pressures the visitors began to find themselves under.

The second half started badly for the hosts. A tragi-comic offside committed by Maidstone in open play gave Barrand the opportunity to reduce the lead to 22-17, immediately after the restart, but once the hosts had regained their composure, they made the extra man tell.

A chip through by Craig Webb, in the Thurrock 22, saw him impeded in the chase, incurring a second yellow card for the visitors and a penalty to Maidstone. The kick to touch was

for Max Guero to finish the move from close range, with ten minutes on the clock.

Thurrock hit back immediately. Winning the ball after the restart, full back, Barrand, executed a perfect chip over the defence and regained the ball, taking play into the Maidstone 22. The score was completed by fly half, North-

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rounded off by a catch and drive, with Lewis Stimpson getting the touchdown in the corner.

With a ten-point margin, Maidstone looked to add to their lead to give them a firmer cushion against a side that continued to look potent outside the scrum. But the next score continued to elude them and it was Thurrock that struck next.

A tap penalty in the Maidstone 22 saw Maidstone's defence under pressure and eventually caught too narrow, allowing second row Smith to score in the right corner to bring the scores to 27-22.



But the last quarter belonged entirely to Maidstone. With the scrum ever more dominant in the tight and the line-out functioning, Thurrock found themselves under increasing defensive pressure, negating any impact they had previously shown outside the scrum.

A Beech penalty on the half hour edged Maidstone further in front while the Danny Baker try, followed by Vaki Antoniou's, a few minutes later, sealed the win for the hosts.

The key to the win lay in the penalty count. Maidstone only incurred six penalties in the whole game, while the visitors incurred sixteen and three yellow cards. In previous games, this penalty count would, most likely, have been in reverse of these figures and Thurrock demonstrated how difficult it is to maintain pressure on the opposition under such circumstances.

Coach, Mike Hebden, was noticeably purring after this win and it is clear that this set of players is now playing to his requirements.

### Maidstone

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

