



## Match Report



London & SE Division 1 (South)

CS Rugby 1863 26 - Maidstone FC 0

Played at Dukes Meadow, Chiswick, Saturday 20 January 2018

This game unfolded in the same pattern as the previous few weeks, resulting in a challenging encounter with second placed CS Rugby but nothing to show for all the effort expended. The 26-0 scoreline was boosted by a couple of late tries but it was Maidstone's lack of cutting edge that ultimately proved their downfall.

The Maidstone pack, once again, was more than a handful for the opposition, pushing them off their ball to win a number of scrums against the head. But the line out did not function well resulting in attacking options from the catch and drive being too easily lost. Defence was generally good, especially against a big back row that proved to be the major focus of the CS attack on a heavy pitch that cut up increasingly as the game progressed, on a rain-soaked afternoon.

With Gary Beck unavailable, Max Guero moved to hooker and Danny Baker came in to start. Charlie Williams replaced the unavailable Ben Massey in the second row and Matt Iles returned to his best position at No 8. George Perry and Ryan Copp formed a new centre pairing but the rest of the back line was unchanged.

CS Rugby started the game at a high tempo and an early break by their open-side wing forward took play into the Maidstone 22 before being on hand to finish the move in the opposite corner. After this early shock, Maidstone increased their defensive commitment, repelling a series of attacks in the first quarter. They were undoubtedly helped by the difficult conditions, which made ball handling difficult, and blunted the pace of the CS backline.

An opportunity to increase their lead just before the end of the quarter was squandered by the hosts when the final pass was forward but as the half progressed, so Maidstone came more into the game. But handling errors thwarted the visitors on more than one occasion and CS took full advantage to relieve the pressure.

The home side increased their lead just past the half hour. A long kick to the Maidstone 22 was taken into touch by Sam Pearson and from the resulting line out, CS Rugby spun the ball left to attack the Maidstone line. While the first assault was repulsed, a second attempt released the open side wing forward and he found a gap to score his second try under the posts. The straightforward conversion by the full back extended the lead to 12-0, which held to half time.

A knock to the head, just after the restart, saw Jack Bramwell on for Max Guero but this didn't upset the rhythm of the Maidstone pack in any way. In fact, quite the opposite, as Maidstone's back row started to come more into the game with Ben Knight and Lewis Stimpson combining well to take the game to the opposition.

At the same time, Maidstone eight found an extra margin in the tight and in successive CS scrums, pushed their opposite numbers off the ball. But as in previous weeks, the last piece in the puzzle, a definitive cutting edge, remained elusive and all the hard work foundered on the oppositions defence.

With the pitch showing increasing signs of cutting up from the heavy rain, both sides increasingly looked to gain field position through the boot. But it was a han-

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ding error, deep into the fourth quarter, by Maidstone that allowed CS to increase their lead.

A line out just in the Maidstone half was successfully negotiated but a loose pass in the back line allowed CS the chance to hack the ball down to the Maidstone line. While the first line of defence held, the quickly recycled ball allowed the CS full back enough space to cross the line in the right corner. With the same player adding the conversion, the hosts increased their lead to 19-0.

With the game securely in the grasp of CS Rugby, and their tails up, all Maidstone could do was defend against the try bonus point. But even this was denied them, in added time, when a catch and drive move from a line out, deep in the Maidstone 22, successfully reached the line, with the hooker getting the touch down. Another fine conversion from the corner extended the host's lead to 26-0.

Try as they might, Maidstone still couldn't breach the CS defence and a last chance of a catch and drive was thwarted by a lost line out on the CS five metre line.

Full marks have to go to the Maidstone side for a spirited effort against an opposition that has strong expectations of promotion. With Matt Iles returning to his rightful back row position, the pack competed fully with their opposite numbers. But once again, the missing ingredient was the lack of sharpness in the back line, which made it difficult to stretch the opposition defence and play on the front foot.

Maidstone

Kieran Gibbons; Max Guero; Danny Baker: Adam Knight; Charlie Williams: Ben Knight; Lewis Stimpson; Matt Iles: Jack Leech; Rory Beech: Vaki Antoniou; Ryan Copp; George Perry; Lucian Morosan: Sam Pearson

Replacements: Jack Bramwell; Will Lane; Shaun Woolford (All used)

