



Match Report



London & SE Division 1 (South)

Havant RFC 52 - Maidstone FC 36

Played at Hooks Lane Ground, Havant, Saturday 16 September 2017

A 36-52 defeat to south-coast side, Havant, looks, on the surface to be a depressing continuation of a losing string of games. But there was much that was positive to be taken from this encounter, not least the solution to the conundrum of who should wear the number ten shirt. This problem has been with the club for a number of years and, in Stuart Doust, a credible answer has been found.

He led the line with authority, spread the ball quickly and, when he was handed the place kicking duties, proceeded to make up for earlier failings in this department. For his efforts, he was handed the man-of-the-match award, no mean feat when Ben Brill also had a fine game on the day.

Maidstone scored six tries, gaining a bonus point for their attacking efforts but the eight that they allowed their hosts was too much and highlighted the weakness of their defence, particularly first-up tackling. In addition, they made too many handling errors when in possession and conceded too many penalties, allowing the opposition off the hook when they looked like conceding more points.

While conceding that Havant deserved to win, Maidstone were in this game for all of the first half. A contentious yellow card decision on the stroke of half time, awarded against Ben Knight for failing to bind properly at a 5-metre scrum, swayed the match decisively at the start of the second half, setting up the two try cushion that Havant maintained to the end of the game.

Without this, and with some improved place kicking, which saw seven early points from the tee thrown away, Maidstone could have provided an upset, at best, or a closer end result.

The back line saw Vaki Antinou return to the left wing and, with only the switch of Doust for Beech, a settled line up emerged. The scrum had a number of changes, with Garry Beck coming into the front row for his first outing this year, Tom Chandler replacing the injured Matt Iles in the second row and Matt Davies taking up the open side position in the back row. Against a large Havant eight, Maidstone looked a little underpowered for the tight encounters but with Tom Mount and Rob Field on the bench, replacements were available to counter this problem.

On a large grassy pitch, with the sun shining and no discernible wind, Havant set out their stall early and took advantage of an early Maidstone mistake to press hard on the Maidstone line from the off. But it was the visitors that struck first. A penalty following some slick handling gave Maidstone field position deep in the hosts 22. While the line out was overthrown, a quick recovery by scrum half, Leech, enabled Doust to slip through a gap to score, half way out.

After this early setback, the hosts replied with a try of their own on ten minutes. A line out established possession and a slick move across the field saw full back, Chambers released on the right to outflank Maidstone's cover and score under the posts. The conversion by fly half, Knight, saw Havant with their noses in front.

Maidstone's reply was emphatic. A spell of pressure built by secure inter-passing forced Havant to concede a penalty and, from the resultant line out, the backs conjured two sweeping moves to release Pat Sykes to score to the right of the posts.

As the first quarter ended, so Havant regained the lead. A chip ahead by fly half, Knight, bounced kindly for him and flat-footed the Maidstone defence, to allow Havant to score under the posts and establish a 14-10 lead.

An opportunity for Maidstone to cut the deficit, from the restart, to one point, from a penalty in





front of the Havant posts, was missed and they were made to pay when Havant reacted quickly to a dropped pass in the Maidstone 22. Knight set up the score for blind-side, Davis, and, with the conversion, established a 21-10 lead.

Havant increased their lead on the half hour, this time through the forwards working their way to the line, for second row, Young, to get the touch down in the corner. But Maidstone hit back just when the hosts thought they were taking control. This time, it was Josh Pankhurst that got the try, taking the scoring pass from Jack Leech. With kicking duties having been passed to Stuart Doust, the conversion cut the deficit to nine points.

With half time approaching, Havant mounted a series of attacks on the Maidstone line. The visitors defended manfully but, after a series of penalties, which Havant took as scrums, a penalty try was awarded and Ben Knight was sent to the bin, which augured badly for the second half with Maidstone facing a 33-17 deficit.

Rob Field and Tom Mount were sent on at the start of the half to add more power to the scrum but with Maidstone a player light, Havant quickly took advantage of the deficit. Knight was again the instigator with a kick over the defence, which he regained and chipped again to release centre, Morris, to score and set up an easy conversion for a 40-17 lead, with only two minutes on the clock.

It would have been easy for heads to drop but, instead, Maidstone hit back. A penalty on half-way allowed Maidstone field position just outside the Havant 22. A Ben Brill break, through the centre, was held but the quickly recycled ball set up Antinou, on the left, to score in the corner.

The see-saw scoring continued and another Havant try, on ten minutes, saw their lead expand again to 45-22. Another Ben Brill break released Antinou to finish from forty yards out and, with Doust on target from the corner, to reduce the deficit to sixteen points, Maidstone kept reminding Havant that the game was far from over, with 25 minutes left on the clock.

With Maidstone under pressure from the hosts for long periods the scoring was brought to a halt and it took a catch and drive from a line out to complete Havant's total, which was bolstered by a fine conversion from the touchline. But Maidstone had the last word as Ben Brill snaffled the ball from a Havant scrum, on their own five metre line, to score, with Stuart Doust converting from the touchline to bring the final score to 52-36.

While better defence is the key going forward, the spirit and zest shown by the back line in this game, added to the solid platform of the front eight, augurs well for better results in the future.

Maidstone Max Guero; Josh Pankhurst; Garry Beck: Adam Knight; Tom Chandler: Ben Knight; Matt Davies; Ben Brill: Jack Leech; Stuart Doust: Ryan Copp; Pat Sykes; George Perry; Vaki Antinou: Rory Beech

Replacements: Tom Mount; Rob Field; Lucian Morosan (All used)

