



Match Report



London & SE Division 1 (South)

Maidstone FC 29 v Brighton RFC 17

Played at The Mote, Saturday 25th November, 2017

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Maidstone's skipper, Ben Williams, has been targeting this match for his return from suspension for some time and it coincided with the availability, from injury, of a number of first choice players. These factors, together with a growing level of confidence, allowed Maidstone to secure their first victory since the opening day of the season, against a mid-table Brighton side.

The 29-17 margin was fully justified but only secured in the last ten minutes of the game, when a two try burst secured not only the victory but a try-bonus point, into the bargain.

A high intensity start, allied to a dominant scrum and improving fluidity, as the game progressed, proved too much for a Brighton side that have always proved to be difficult opponents. Building on this renaissance will be the test for Maidstone, in the coming weeks, with games against a couple of clubs leading the charge for promotion. What this game proved was that with a full squad to choose from, Maidstone's current position, in the lower echelons of the league, is not a reflection of the quality that resides within.

Recent games have been lost by an inability to cope with big, fast, flying wingers and the return of Shaun Woolford and Sam Pearson, out wide, looked to plug this gap. Ryan Copp, also returning from injury, took up the problematic fly half position, while Matt Iles was positioned at inside centre from the off, partnering George Perry.



A new front row of Tom Mount, Josh Pankhurst and the skipper, promised greater solidity in the tight, while Adam Knight returned from injury to partner Ben Massey in the power house. To complete the changes, Seth Waterworth came in at No 8 and rounded off a storming display by claiming the spectators' man-of-the-match award.



Intensity and accuracy was the message head-coach, Mike Hebden, left with the team as they took the field and, on this occasion, they delivered in spades. The opening period saw Maidstone put together a spell of fifteen-man rugby that gained them field position leading to early attempts on the Brighton line. But it was a mistake by the visitors, as the ten-minute point

approached that led to the first score.

A Maidstone line out in the visitor's 22, saw the ball bobbling between the sides and Ben Knight's quick recovery gave him the opportunity to secure the ball and cross the line. Maidstone increased their lead on the quarter hour, when the Brighton scrum was pushed off its own ball for Seth Waterworth to feed Josh Pankhurst for a score by the posts. Ryan Copp's conversion stretched the lead to 12-0.



It was inevitable that after such a start, Brighton would get back into the game: and so it proved. Maidstone defended, admirably, for a long periods but, eventually, Brighton's back line found a gap and fly half, Tegelaars, crossed the line. His conversion reduced the deficit to five points and the game seemingly, had reached a cross roads.

As the game opened up, Maidstone continued to play on the front foot, but Brighton had the final say of the half when their skipper, Forward, went over in the right corner, to level the scores deep into added time.



Maidstone started the second half as they had the first, but Brighton's defence held firm and thwarted a number of good opportunities. Building on their strong defence, Brighton put together a series of

moves that stretched the Maidstone defence to its limits and, once again, Forward took the scoring pass to put the visitors in the lead, 12-17.

With the last quarter of the match to play, the onus returned to Maidstone to up their game and this they did, in style. Two scrums deep in the visitors' 22, saw Maidstone completely dominate the Brighton eight and, while Seth Waterworth was denied after the first, the second led to Lewis Stimpson crossing the line to level the scores.

Brighton then mounted a spirited riposte but



Maidstone's defence proved equal to the task of denying them any satisfaction and, with the clock ticking round to the forty minute mark, came back into the game. A quick tap free kick, half way into the Brighton half, was moved left and Seth Waterworth finished the move in the corner.

Any debate concerning whether the five-point margin would be sufficient was made redundant a couple of minutes later, when from a scrum on half way, a Waterworth break fed hooker, Pankhurst, for him to return the favour setting up the No 8 for the try, by the posts. The simple conversion took the score to 29-17 and confirmed the victory.



Maidstone can take heart from this win. It has been clear for some time that the squad has the capability to compete in this league but injuries and suspensions have proved decisive in robbing them of too many key performers. With high-flying Chichester on the agenda, next week, the extent of the improvement will be put to the test.

Maidstone: Ben Williams; Josh Pankhurst; Tom Mount: Adam Knight; Ben Massey: Ben Knight; Lewis Stimpson; Seth Waterhouse: Lucian Morosan; Ryan Copp: Sean Woolford; Matt Iles; George Perry; Sam Pearson: Jack Leech
Replacements: Gary Beck; Charlie Williams; Euan Caborn (All used)

