



Match Report



London 2 (South East)

Deal & Betteshanger RFC 29 v Maidstone FC 31

Played at The Drill Field, Deal, Saturday 26th January 2019

When Ole Gunnar Solskjær took over at Manchester United, the players responded immediately and produced a string of victories to the delight of supporters of that Club. No less delighted were the Maidstone supporters who travelled to Deal on Saturday, to see whether the change to the coaching team could galvanize our players in a similar fashion. Despite Maidstone scoring first with an impressive team try, the answer appeared to be “no”, as Deal closed the gap and then drove nail after nail into the Maidstone coffin until at 29-7 and with only 20 minutes left on the clock, only the most one-eyed optimist could have hoped for a win. But in the most thrilling climax to a match seen by anyone on the touch-line in recent years, the visitors smashed and grabbed their way to victory leaving their hosts bewildered, deflated and not a little shell-shocked. For the players, this was some consolation for the several games this season where narrow winning positions were snatched from them in the last few minutes of the game.

On a firm pitch with a strong cross-wind slightly favouring Deal in the first-half, Maidstone weathered the early exchanges before showing that they had not travelled to make up the numbers. With 6 minutes played, winger Josh Smith battered his way up the middle of the pitch into the Deal 22 before off-loading to Sam Weston and Will Fox to continue the charge until Skipper Lucian Morosan was able to pick up and dive over near the posts for Maidstone’s first score, the conversion chipped over by Jason Smith on his return to the team, as though he were using a pitching-wedge.

D&B were stung by this early shock and began to exert some authority in front of their home crowd. On 16 mins they kicked a penalty 3-7 but shortly afterwards, Jason Smith’s golf-wedge technique looked questionable when a 30 metre penalty attempt in front of the Deal posts that would have kept some pressure on the hosts, failed to travel the distance. The Deal kicker again lapped up a routine penalty kick soon afterwards 6-7 and then Deal took the lead for the first time on 29 minutes when a loose ball in their own 22 was collected by their winger who hugged the touch-line and out-stripped the Maidstone tacklers to score wide-out for 5 unconverted points 11-7. A further 3 penalty points for a scrum-offence and then another winger’s try from Deal as the ball was carried nearly to the try-line on the left touchline before Mikey Grice at full-back scythed down the runner, only to see it moved swiftly through the home three-quarters for the right-winger to touch down in the corner before half-time for a 5 further points and a 19-7 advantage.

With the wind giving Maidstone a slight advantage in the 2nd half, enabling them to play more of the game in opposition territory, there was some cause for optimism amongst the travelling support but a penalty for offside at the break-down took the score to an emphatic 22-7 with 10 minutes played and then on 13 minutes, the Deal winger evaded a weak tackle near the touch-line to run in behind the posts and seal Maidstone’s fate with a 7-pointer and a seemingly unsailable 29-7 lead.

At this point, some changes saw Will Lane and the ultra-experienced (and pretty substantial) Martin Maytum replace Dan Fisher and Ashley Gilligan respectively – both of whom had had good games up to that point, especially in defence. Mar-





tin's weight and experience gave an added impetus to Maidstone in the scrum and the forward style now changed to the pick and go game at which he excels – not to mention Ben Massey who revelled in the tight forwards-orientated keep -hold-of-the-ball phases that began to develop.

A penalty in the middle of the park for not-releasing afforded Deal a routine kick in front of goal to compound Maidstone's woes but the attempt was pushed wide and the tide had finally turned. Maidstone forced their way down-field and began to batter the Deal try-line with pick and drive. Blind-side flanker Jamie Marzetti, Maidstone's man of the match for his loose play, his line-out work and his ball-carrying, was held up over the line and from the 5 yard scrum that saw Deal back-peddalling, No 8 Sam Weston was able to power over near the posts, with a Jason Smith conversion for 14-29.

In a bizarre passage of play that saw the Deal supporters shaking their heads with disbelief, a high ball from Alex Clark proved to be a difficult bouncing ball for the Deal full-back to field on the half-way line. As the onrushing Scott De Zoeten grabbed him, he managed to snatch it off the ground and fling it across field towards the other wing where a lucky bounce enabled Vaki Antoniou to gather at pace and speed past the defence to the try-line for an unconverted 5 points, 29-19.

Still no-one was thinking that the game could be won but a 4-try bonus point now looked achievable.

Again the pick and drive game on the Deal try-line with the coaching team exhorting the forwards to keep the ball and stay patient. Eventually, after assault after assault, with Tom Varker carrying especially well and Lucian repeatedly digging the ball out from behind rucks and choosing good options, the ball was shifted quickly to the right wing where Josh Smith was able to spin out of a tackle and go over from 5 yards out for another 5 points and a 29-24 score-line.

Deal were by no means done and came straight back with a kick off into the Maidstone 22 that was mis-fielded and bobbled loose. Alex Clark picked up the ball on the run and evaded on coming tacklers before slipping the ball to Josh Smith who cut a good line and accelerated through the first line of defence into the wide-open spaces behind them. With only the full-back and winger to beat, he fended off their despairing tackles and galloped over under the posts to the disbelief of home and away supporters. The simple conversion in front of the posts was slotted by Lucian Morosan, capping his best display of the season, to jubilation for everyone in Red White and Black and utter misery for the home club.

The final 3 minutes were seen out safely until a Maidstone penalty in their own 22 gave Lucian a chance to kick the ball out for the most unlikely but welcome of victories.

Now, having seen that the seemingly impossible can happen, its just a matter of emulating Ole Gunnar Solskjær to win the next seven !!

Maidstone: Fox; Varker; Gilligan; Williams, Massey, Marzetti; Fisher; Weston; Morosan ©; Clark; Smith (Jason), De Zoeten; Antoniou; Grice.

Replacements: Maytum; Lane; Chandler

