



Match Report



London & SE Division 1 (South)

Thurrock RFC 26 - Maidstone FC 17

Played at Oakfield, Thurrock, Saturday 28 October 2017

With four personnel and three positional changes, there were, once again, concerns that Maidstone would struggle to impose themselves on a game that had 'must win' inked all over it. The final score of 26-17 to Thurrock was a disappointment but barely does justice to the second half revival mounted by Maidstone after facing a 21-3 deficit at half time.

Was this a reflection of the half time team talk, grasping at the 'nothing to lose' straw or finally getting the pieces of the team to gel into a whole? Probably a combination of all three but the bottom line is another strike in the loss column with the season one-third completed.

Undoubtedly, the most frustrated by this poor, early season showing are the players themselves. Injuries have played havoc with selection and those left standing have not lacked in courage, or effort, but a win is a must in the next few games to restore confidence.

The game at Thurrock against a side that has suffered its own early season problems, was no exception to the trend established over the last few weeks. After an even first quarter, the home side scored three converted tries in the second quarter, boosting their confidence, and establishing the platform for their victory.

With Adam Knight out with a leg muscle injury, Rob Field stepped up into the second row to consolidate the position he has occupied from the bench over the last few weeks. The back row required significant rejigging, with Ben Brill a long-term casualty and Matt Iles moved into the centre to add some beef to the back line. Lewis Stimpson and Jack Lamb occupied the flanks with Ben Knight taking up the No 8 role he capably filled at Cobham.

Matt Moore returned on the left wing with Jack Leech at full back to deploy his footballing skills. With no recognised kicker in the side, Moore stepped up into this role and surprised everyone with a 100% record, with three well-taken kicks supplementing his eye-catching runs down the wing.

With a strong diagonal wind blowing across the pitch and into the visitors' faces, Maidstone started the game trying to play a fast-moving handling game which foundered because passes went astray. Thurrock, after an early spell on the back foot had the first opportunity to get points on the board, after ten minutes, but a Worsfold penalty was hooked wide.

With nerves creeping into the play from both sides, it took a series of catch and drive moves by the home side, just into the second quarter, following a penalty in mid-field, to get their noses in front. No 8, Russo, got the touch down from

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close quarters and Worsfold added the conversion.

From the restart, Maidstone won a penalty on the 35 metre mark and Matt Moore stepped up to convert with aplomb. A lapse in concentration following the Thurrock restart allowed the ball into touch and from the line out, the home side moved the ball right to set up inside centre, Stanley, to score, with Worsfold adding the conversion.

To compound Maidstone’s miseries, Ben Knight received a yellow card shortly thereafter and, from the penalty, Thurrock established another attacking position in the Maidstone half and made their extra man tell, with Worsfold taking the final pass from a lengthy attacking move. With another conversion from their fly half, Thurrock established a 21-3 lead, with half time approaching.

Maidstone started the second half inauspiciously with a fumbled attempt at running the ball out of their 22 but with a full complement restored, they held the Thurrock attack at bay and slowly began to establish momentum of their own. A penalty at a Thurrock line out saw Morosan tap and run and with Pankhurst carrying on the move, Stimpson was released to score in the left corner. With a fine Matt Moore conversion from near the touchline, Maidstone showed, at last, that their attack had teeth.

Within five minutes, Maidstone had added to their total. Once again Morosan was the instigator, following a long kick downfield. With the chase pinning the Thurrock defence in their own 22, the scrum half moved to the right with Leech setting up Alex Clark, on for Elliot Green, to score half way out. Another solid conversion from Matt Moore reduced the deficit to 21-17, inspiring concerns in the home crowd.

But Thurrock dug in and Maidstone’s revival hit the buffers. A late try by Thurrock, with left wing, Barrand, taking advantage of a poorly directed Maidstone kick, to touch down in the corner, was the final piece in this game, sending the visitors home without even the consolation of a losing bonus point.

The final indignity was another yellow card, this time for prop, Gary Beck, at a pile up, which meant Maidstone had to play out the final minutes a man down.

While everyone seeks a solution to this poor run of form, there are some questions that need answering: why do we allow the opposition to get on to the front foot, with poor starts to games; why do we only find our attacking game when we are behind; why do we cede the initiative by giving away penalties? Answers on a postcard, please.

Maidstone Kieron Gibbons; Josh Pankhurst; Garry Beck: Rob Field; Ben Massey: Jack Lamb; Lewis Stimpson; Ben Knight: Lucian Morosan; Rory Beech: Elliot Green; Matt Iles; George Perry; Matt Moore: Jack Leech

Replacements: Danny Baker; Jack Johnson; Alex Clark (All used)

