

Match Report

Shepherd Neame Kent Cup, Round 1
by Andy Golding

Deal and Betteshanger Lions 19 v Maidstone 20

Saturday 8th September 2012 - Away - Kick Off 3pm

Following a comfortable win in their pre-league season outing last week, Maidstone travelled to play Deal and Betteshanger Lions (DBL) from London 2 South East in the first round of the Kent Cup. It is always a tough challenge to play DBL on their home turf and this was no exception. With the Mustangs also in action at DBL (securing an emphatic win) and a few changes from the previous week, Maidstone showed that they have real strength in depth and talent.



Played as part of Maidstone's pre-league preparations, this had all the hallmarks of a classic cup encounter in what proved to be a thrilling game against a very good, organised and tactically astute side. DBL continually asked questions of Maidstone but far from being found wanting, Maidstone produced an impressive team performance, which showed great depth of character and discipline to over-turn a 13 point deficit in the last quarter to win.

DBL started the game with intensity and creative use of the ball by their backs and close quarter work by their forwards starved Maidstone of any real quality possession. As a result, Maidstone found it difficult to settle into any form of rhythm, which in turn hampered their ability to look after the ball. It was also fortunate that an early penalty chance by DBL was missed, following a yellow card for Maidstone flanker Grabb in the first 10 minutes for tackling the ball carrier within 10m from a quickly taken penalty. However, with the resulting numerical advantage and following an excellent counter by their 9 from deep, DBL exploited space on the right flank allowing their winger to run in uncontested from the 22 to score an unconverted try.

Despite, their limited possession Maidstone tried to move the ball whenever they could and strong running by winger, Jason Smith allowed Maidstone to attack deep into the DBL 22 only to be thwarted by some solid defence. However, continued pressure by Maidstone resulted in a penalty on the 15 minute mark kicked by Smith to get some much needed points on the board. There then followed a period of evenly matched, dogged play until a penalty on 35 minutes, allowed Maidstone to nudge ahead, despite not being



able to gain any firm foot-hold in the game.



With confidence clearly growing, The DBL forwards, then began to take the Maidstone pack on in the tight and following the effective use of the rolling maul, they were rewarded with a converted try following a catch and drive at the lineout to finish the half at 6-12. This was a tactic that DBL continued to exploit but following some half-time adjustment was nullified by the Maidstone forwards as the game progressed.

The 2nd half started well for Maidstone, who began to stamp their authority on the game. With increased momentum and an ability to keep hold of the ball for prolonged periods of play, Maidstone began to play with more cohesion and exert pressure. However, the DBL defence remained resolute and they managed to repel the Maidstone attacks. DBL used the boot well and continually pinned Maidstone back to gain good field position. As a result, and in their first real attack of the second half, good lines of running and awareness allowed the DBL 12 to out-step the Maidstone defence from inside the 22 to score a converted try. This made the score 6-19 with a quarter to go and Maidstone with all to play for.

In response and to their immense credit, Maidstone rallied and with increased possession and precision to their play started to set up a number of sustained forceful attacks by linking forwards and backs in the DBL 22. DBL defended well until slick passing and smart use of space stretched a tiring DBL defence to allow, winger James Davies to score wide out on the left flank. A well taken conversion by Smith reduced the deficit to just 6 points with 15 minutes left.



The balance of power then began to shift as Maidstone grew in purpose and intent and after another period of sustained pressure, a feed to centre Neil Graves at full tilt, opened up the DBL defence and with 2 DBL players in hot pursuit and closing, Graves used his strength and power to score to the left of the posts. Another successful conversion by Smith meant that Maidstone were in now in the lead by 1 point at 20-19.



With 10 minutes of the game left, DBL threw everything they had at Maidstone and with effective tactical kicking and decisive running, DBL continually hammered away at the Maidstone line from set piece and loose play only to be met by a defiant, stone wall defence. It was not until Maidstone were awarded a penalty on their on line during injury time that they could breathe a sigh of relief and kick the ball into touch for the final whistle.

Maidstone were obviously jubilant with the win but commiserations go to DBL for a very hard fought game that could have gone either way. From a league preparation perspective, this was a game that should stand both Clubs in good stead. We wish DBL all the best in their league campaign and would like to thank them for their hospitality in accommodating our 1s and 2s on the day.

