



Match Report



London Division 2 (South East)

Ashford RFC 21 v Maidstone FC 34

Played at Kinney's Lane, Ashford, Saturday 20th Sept, 2014



It has been a couple of seasons since Maidstone travelled to Kinney's Lane to face Ashford and this was to be the first encounter between these two sides at this level of competition. Against an home side that always posed a threat through their 'attack from anywhere' ethos; Head Coach Paul Hathaway felt the side had failed to implement some of the basic fundamentals of the game, and whilst the county town club still ran out 21-34 winners, there was a feeling that the margin of victory could and probably should have been greater.

The Maidstone side featured a number of changes from last week's contest at Crowborough, with Debnam starting in the front row and Matt Iles filling the second row slot alongside his brother in the absence of the unavailable Alex Hadi. Eddie Cranston made his league debut at openside flank and took the Man of the Match accolade for his efforts, with Alex Przemski starting at scrum half and Ben Pitkin on the bench along with Joel Byford & Ian Lee. In the back division James Douglas moved to the full back slot with Alex Clark making his 1st XV debut on the right wing.



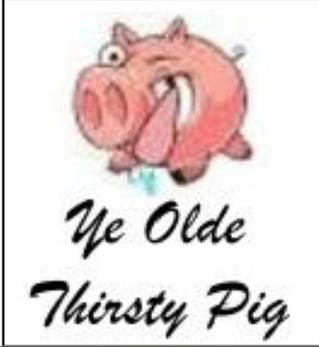
Maidstone started much the brighter of the sides and the overwhelming majority of the half was played in Ashford territory and it took just three minutes for the visitors to get the scoreboard rolling as in the first real foray into Ashford territory the home side were penalised for not releasing in the tackle with Maidstone's Brad Ford calmly kicking the three points for an early lead.

This was extended ten minutes later when from a lineout on the Ashford 22m Maidstone drove the ball at the home defence, with Cranston making the initial drive deep into the 22m, Ben Brill was on hand to pick up from the base of the ensuing ruck to touchdown to the left of the posts, unfortunately Ford couldn't add the extras from what was probably the easiest of his afternoon's kicking duties.



With the match being contested almost ex-

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clusively in the Ashford half, Maidstone thought they were in again towards the end of the first quarter as an attack down the left flank saw the ball recycled and moved quickly to the right with winger Alex Clark on hand to outpace the home defence to touchdown under the posts. With the referee signalling the try, it was skipper Ben Williams that drew the referee's attention to the linesman's flag on the left touchline.



The visitors held the majority of territorial advantage and were creating the majority of the attacking opportunities, although the Ashford defence was working hard to defend their line through a very high tackle count. With solid set piece play and penetrating runs by Jamie Perigo, Jonno Skelton, Alex Clark and James Douglas it was somewhat against that run of play that Ashford scored on the thirty minute mark. From an attacking lineout in the Ashford 22m, Maidstone were guilty of some loose passing and an intercept by Ashford saw the ball fed to right wing Grant Burden who was able to outpace the wrong-footed defence over 70m to touch down under the posts, with Henry Hall adding the extra points.



Maidstone's response was not long in coming and on the 34th minute Perigo made a telling break from midfield beating several tacklers into the Ashford 22m before the cover defence was able to haul him down, he was able to present the ball to the supporting Cranston who touched down under the post, with Ford making no mistake this time in adding the extras to extend the visitors lead to 7-15.

With the interval beckoning it was Ashford that went onto the attack, looking to move the ball at every opportunity, but with the visitors defence holding firm the whistle sounded for half-time.

Maidstone were first on the scoreboard in fifth minute of the second half, when from a scrum in midfield Ashford were guilty of spilling the ball, Skelton was the quickest to pounce on the loose ball and was able to outpace the home defence from 40m out to touchdown next to the post, Ford added the conversion to extend Maidstone's lead to 22-7.



With 30 minutes remaining Ashford started to make changes, although Maidstone continued to apply pressure and saw a drop goal attempt narrowly drift to the right of the posts. As the game entered the final quarter the visitors made changes of their own with Byford on in the front row and Ian Lee replacing Matt Iles. On the 25th minute Maidstone extended their lead further, securing the bonus point in the process when from a 5-metre scrum they exploited the blindside channel, with Ben Brill on hand to take the scoring pass from Perigo and touch down wide on the right, the unsuccessful conversion just drifting across the front of the posts.



Ashford, by no means out of the contest were next on the scoreboard when following an attack down the left flank the ball fell loose in midfield and was collected by full-back Hall, with the obvious choice being to move the ball wide he in-

stead set of on a jinking run, and some poor Maidstone tackling saw him in under the posts and subsequently adding the extras to narrow the deficit to thirteen points.

The Maidstone response was again quick in coming and with 7 minutes remaining, following a 5-metre scrum on the Ashford line, the clearance by fly-half Rory Beech was half charged down, with Maidstone collecting the ball just inside the Ashford 22m Brill was on hand to pierce the home defence and touchdown under the posts to complete his hat-trick.



With bonus points still to play for, Ashford's 'attack from anywhere' ethos came to the fore and in a closing few minutes the match became very loose and more akin to 7s than the full version of the game. With the home side always looking to move the ball through hands at every opportunity, and from anywhere on the pitch; they finally got their reward with Ben Cooper on hand to take the final pass following a sweeping move that had utilised the full width of the pitch more than once, Hall added the extras to bring the scoreline to the final tally of 21-34.

In summary, there is still much to work on before the side really starts to perform well, with some of the basic aspects of the game that need sharpening. Whilst the side may feel that the margin of victory could have been greater, notwithstanding a stout and resolute Ashford defence, it was their own failure to execute the basics that at times saw opportunities slip away. As for Ashford, in this early season with the grounds hard & fast, their attacking ethos will certainly cause sides problems, how they perform under conditions less suited to loose running rugby, we will have to see.

Maidstone: Williams (C), Pankhurst, Debnam, Iles M, Iles J, Bishop, Cranston, Brill, Przemski, Ford, Morosan, Perigo, Skelton, Clark, Douglas. **Replacements:** Byford, Lee, Pitkin

