



## Match Report



London Division 2 (South East)

Aylesford Bulls RFC 0 v Maidstone FC 62

Played at The Jack Williams Memorial Ground, Aylesford,

Saturday 6th Dec, 2014



**M**aidstone's last outing was a top of the table clash against one of their nearest challengers in the league but this week's fixture saw a very different encounter. Whilst this local derby saw only a few miles separate the sides geographically, in terms of their league standings the two sides couldn't be further apart in what was a top versus bottom league encounter. Recent seasons have seen a reversal in fortunes for these two clubs, with the county town club resurgent, whilst near neighbours Aylesford are enduring a torrid season and are still to earn their first points as the campaign approaches the half-way point. In what was the proverbial 'game of two halves' and despite the home team's somewhat crude efforts to disrupt Maidstone's style of play in what at times became a fractious match, they could not live with the pace and direct running of the county town club, with the visitors running in 48 second half points, to romp to a comfortable victory. It would now appear that in rugby terms, the balance of power in the county town has noticeably shifted back to the Mote Park club.

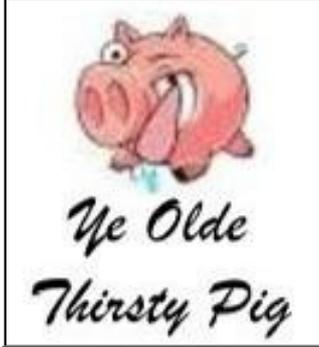


After a week off last weekend to clear niggling injuries, although with the longer term injuries to Ben Brill, Luke Debnam and Matt Iles still keeping them on the side-lines: Head Coach Paul Hathaway's side still featured a couple of changes from the line-up that beat Tunbridge Wells. In the starting XV Nick Bunyan, who took the Man of the Match award for his performance, featured alongside James Iles in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Row, the side's potent back division was unchanged, whilst the bench saw Will Fox and Euan Caborn alongside Neil Graves.



Local derbies can be great levellers, and for the opening few minutes this was no different; Maidstone were keen to avoid a start similar to last season's equivalent fixture, which, played in much better weather conditions saw Maidstone slow out of the blocks and the hosts very much looking like leading contenders. The opening

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exchanges were largely in midfield as Maidstone looked to get their offloading game going against a home side that despite being strong in the set piece, offered only a limited attacking threat.

With the home side kicking away possession and looking to make the visitors play from deep in their own territory it wasn't until midway through the opening quarter that Maidstone opened their account following some good forward support play that saw 2<sup>nd</sup> Row James Iles make the last few yards to touchdown midway out on the left, with Nick Childs adding the extras to give the visitors an early 0-7 advantage. The end of the quarter saw the hosts only real scoring opportunity as from a penalty attempt close to the Maidstone 22m drifted wide of the posts but it was Maidstone's own errors that were



really stalling their progress. The match became a somewhat staccato affair during the middle period of the half with both sides forced into fielding blood replacements; Aylesford's tactic of kicking for territory was taking its toll they were forced into an endless cycle of defensive tackles on the visitors powerful attacking runners and resulted in the loss of the right wing on the half hour mark. The closing minutes of the half saw Maidstone hammering at the Aylesford line,

and following a couple of 5-metre scrums after Bunyan and Mike Werahiko were held up on the tryline, the ball was moved wide for James Perigo to slip past the defence to cross to the right of the posts, Childs added the extras for a 0-14 lead. It was in time added that the game saw its first eruption as tempers frayed and it was surprising that the referee felt no need to reach for a card from his pocket, something which in hindsight may have prevented further eruptions.

As has been the case this season, it has been strong performances in the second period that have been the hallmark of Maidstone's play, and if their performance had stuttered against a determined Aylesford defence in the first half, there was to be no repetition in the second as Maidstone resumed the scoring inside five minutes with Eddie Cranston crossing for the first of a stream of second half tries as they ran the home defence ragged. Five minutes later they had scored again when, in what was text book play Maidstone secured quick ball from a lineout on the Aylesford 22m the ball travelled along the back division with left winger Lucien Morosan crossing in the corner.



With the bonus point secured, coach Hathaway started to ring the changes with Caborn on for Jonno Skelton in midfield, and Neil Graves joining the back row. Maidstone's forward ball carriers were by now making big inroads into the Aylesford defence with Bunyan, Josh Pankhurst and skipper Ben Williams to the fore, and Lenny Van de Velde proving a handful in the back division. It was these penetrating runs from their own half that kept Maidstone on the front foot and the end of the third quarter saw the lead extend to 0-29 with Joel Byford crossing after Morosan had been hauled down short of the line following an initial Pankhurst break.



By now the sheer number of defensive tackles being made by the home side was beginning to take its toll as Maidstone were now relentlessly camped in Aylesford territory, with Pankhurst

crossing for the first of his two scores and Caborn adding the extras. The next score came almost from the restart as Maidstone attacked from deep, and with the backs keeping the ball alive wide on the left, the recycled ball came to crowd favourite Neil Graves to canter over for his first score this season.

With Morosan now having moved into the scrum-half berth and the game becoming increasingly fractious as Aylesford's defence became increasingly frustrated and Maidstone continued to 'turn the screw', the visitors were on the scoreboard again as they extended the lead to 0-48 in the final quarter when Childs created the extra man to exploit the narrow side from an attacking scrum to cross in the right corner.

The restart saw a Bunyan make a 50m run into the heart of the tiring Aylesford defence, and with the ball quickly recycled Perigo was on hand for his second try of the match wide on the right with Caborn adding the extras. Maidstone were almost in again from the restart as they swept the ball first left and then back to the right with only a high tackle on James Douglas preventing the score although the visitors capped off the scoring in added time with Pankhurst crossing for his second score and Caborn adding the extras for a resounding 62 point victory

In summary; local derbies will always throw up difficult conditions and any team can be competitive for a period but as the game wore on the pace and quality of Maidstone's play came to the fore as the effect of their bigger and more powerful ball carriers took its toll on a tiring defence. However, Maidstone need to get back to hitting their stride earlier in the match, when they play as they did in the second half with solid basic skills and direct running at space with the ball in hand they are a difficult side to resist.

**Maidstone:** Williams (C), Pankhurst, Byford, Iles J, Bunyan, Lamb, Werahiko, Cranston, McPherson Skelton, Morosan, Perigo, Van der Velde, Douglas, Childs. **Replacements:** (All Used) Fox, Graves, Caborn

