



## Match Report



London Division 2 (South East)

Maidstone FC 15 v Beckenham RFC 10

Played at The Mote, Maidstone, Saturday 28th February, 2015



**W**ith last week's fixture against Colfes having been postponed this week's return to league action saw leaders Maidstone host Beckenham at The Mote for the first time in 4 years.

As had been the case in mid-November, a cup battle prior to taking on Beckenham had taken its toll and Head Coach Paul Hathaway was forced to shuffle his resources; with a number of unavailability's, niggling injuries and players rather topically going through concussion 'return to play' protocols. In a side featuring seven changes from the last outing, the forwards saw an entirely different front row with Joel Byford and Will Fox on either side of Josh McKenzie in his first full game since injury in October.

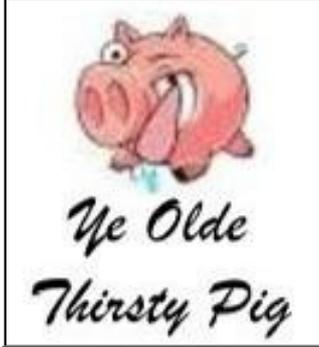


The 2<sup>nd</sup> Row saw Ian Lee starting alongside James Iles, whilst the back row featured Matt Davies and Eddie Cranston on the flanks, with Ben Brill occupying the No8 berth and skippering the side. In the backs there were fewer changes with Lucien Morosan occupying into the scrum half berth with Nick Childs moving to flyhalf and Jonno Skelton taking one of the centre positions; whilst on the wing Alex Clark started in the absence of Olly Newton. The replacements bench saw the returning Matt Iles joined by Ben Pitkin and Mustangs XV skipper Nathan Fitzpatrick.



The early season fixture had been a convincing result for the county town club, but with the return from Blackheath of prodigal son James Cleverly in the front row, and on the back of a useful win against Crowborough, this was an entirely different encounter against a cohesive side, where despite home advantage, Maidstone had to

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work hard for the points.

In a match played in damp conditions and on a greasy surface this was always going to be a battle between the two forward packs, in what at times an error strewn game with handling errors and infringements interrupting any fluency. The early forays were played out in midfield but it was the home side that mounted the first meaningful attack, the ten minute mark saw Morosan field a 22m restart and make inroads into the visiting defence, with the attack then taken on by Jamie Perigo and Childs before being halted deep in the Beckenham 22m. Quick recycled ball saw Morosan on hand to pick up from the



base of the ruck to scamper over 10m to the right of the posts, although Childs failed to add the extras the home side appeared to be on their way.

Beckenham had other ideas and their response was almost immediate, Maidstone failed to deal with the restart effectively and gifted possession to the visiting forwards, a penalty infringement followed and whilst the visitors were unable to capitalise they had the momentum.

Good ball from a subsequent penalty lineout inside the home 22m saw the Beckenham forwards make the initial drives before the ball was swung wide for left wing BJ Tarbie to get the touchdown in the corner, a good conversion kick from Jake Caddy saw Beckenham take a 5-7 lead.

The end of the quarter saw Maidstone on the offensive and after period of pressure the Beckenham defence were penalised under the posts, instead of taking the 3-points on offer a quick tap by scrum half Morosan saw Perigo pulled down short of the line but with Byford, who was to collect the man of the match award for his efforts, taking on the ball to be driven over 5m to the left of the posts, with Childs adding the extras Maidstone had restored their lead with a 12-7 advantage.



Much of the remainder of the half was played in midfield, with both sides creating opportunities but strong defence and simple errors disrupting any real continuity in play and whilst the visitors showed ambition to move the ball, in many cases it was Maidstone's profligacy to turn over possession that provided the platform for those opportunities. A break by Skelton late in the half almost turned the Beckenham defence, but when the ball was moved wide poor handling saw the ball fumbled with the line at their mercy and support outside; when a further opportunity from a Cranston break also

came to nought it was symptomatic of the overall performance.



Maidstone made one change during the half-time interval with Matt Iles replacing Ian Lee for a dislocated thumb. With the home side having had the benefit of the slope in the first half, the question was whether a 5-point advantage would be enough against this im-

proved Beckenham side, which had in large part held its own in the first period. In the end it was a battle between two defences with neither ever breaking the deadlock and a penalty for both sides the only scores of the second half.

Beckenham had the better of the early battles in the half and whilst they were able to generate some good continuity to their play to keep the home side penned in their own half, the pressure they exerted was only on the home 22m without really threatening the tryline. A penalty infringement just outside the Maidstone 22m mid-

way through the third quarter gave Caddy the opportunity to reduce the deficit, which he duly took to bring the score to 12-10. The hour mark saw Childs leave the pitch and the backline reshuffled with Pitkin on at scrumhalf and Skelton moving into the flyhalf berth, Morosan moved to outside centre. Beckenham continued to exert pressure and it was a charge down by Skelton that was the catalyst to Maidstone turning the tide and exerting a period of pressure of their own. This period saw the Beckenham defence severely tested close to their own line and whilst it stood up to the examination well, in the end referee Ben Bulpett saw one infringement too many, with flanker Luke Aylward collecting the yellow card that would see the



visitors finish the match with fourteen men. With Pitkin taking the three points on offer and Beckenham down a man the home side could afford to run down the clock as long as they maintained their composure and with the closing minutes seeing uncontested scrums due to a Beckenham injury the remainder of the game was played out in midfield with Maidstone taking the match 15-10.

In summary, whilst a side can cope with 2-3 changes, the imposition of wholesale player and positional changes across the side showed in the lack of continuity in this at times disjointed and error strewn performance. However, in season's past

Maidstone have crumbled in these circumstances, and whilst the conditions contributed somewhat to both sides difficulties, the ability to grind out a winning result against top half opposition is testament to the sides resolve and growing maturity as well as their title ambitions.

**Maidstone:** Maidstone: Fox, McKenzie, Byford, Iles J, Lee, Davies, Grab, Cranston, Morosan, Childs, Clark, Perigo, Skelton, Eastwood, Douglas. **Replacements:** Iles M, Pitkin (used), Fitzpatrick.

