



# Match Report

## RFU Intermediate Cup

### National Final

#### Bridgnorth RFC 18 v Maidstone FC 31



Played at Twickenham Stadium, Sunday 3rd May, 2015



The county town club crowned their unbeaten season claiming the RFU Intermediate Cup with an 18-31 victory that was built on a scintillating first half display of rugby fit to grace both the home of English rugby and the occasion. With an early Ollly Newton try setting them on their way to a 24-6 half-time lead and an Eddie Cranston try early in the second half, they had sufficient of a cushion to withstand a late Bridgnorth onslaught in the final quarter of the match

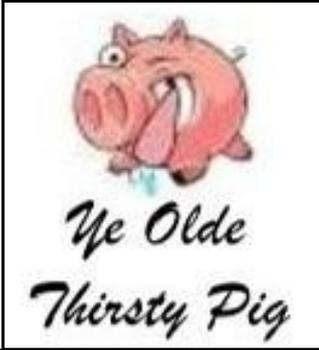


Head Coach Paul Hathaway made only one enforced change from the side that beat Cony Hill, with centre Lenny Van der Velde desperately unlucky to miss out, after sustaining an ACL injury in the meaningless dead rubber at O Colfeians. Whilst the side featured some changes, it is worth noting that almost 40% of the matchday squad had changed as this cup run has progressed, since the first outing against Harrow back in October.

The coaching team had been keen to tell the players to enjoy the day, concentrate on their own strengths and play their own game and not worry about the oppositions relative strengths and weaknesses. In fact little heed had been paid to Bridgnorth's impressive unbeaten run in the build up to the final.



From the outset it was Maidstone who settled the quicker and were immediately on the front foot with Bridgnorth penned back in their 22m. Quick recycled ball saw the initial break made by Jamie Perigo who fed Ollly Newton who was able to breach the Shropshire club's defence



from close range and touchdown close to the posts. With Ben Pitkin adding the extras Maidstone had a 7-0 advantage after only 3 minutes.

This was extended to 10 points midway through the opening quarter when Pitkin slotted a difficult penalty attempt from wide on the right after Bridgnorth were penalised for holding on. Maidstone remained on the front foot, and even without the ball their defensive line speed and the ferocity of the tackles saw them dominate the collisions and breakdown area with Bridgnorth's big ball carriers struggling to gain any penetration to get out of their own half. Maidstone struck again midway through the half with what was probably the pick of the tries. A period of pressure close to the opposition line midway out on the right saw referee ??? Play the advantage after a Bridgnorth infringement.



Maidstone moved the ball wide to the left before quick recycled ball was then moved rapidly back to the right with winger Alex Eastwood able to beat the last two defenders and touch down in the corner; and with Pitkin adding the extras with an excellent conversion the county town club had built a solid 17-0 advantage.

The half-hour saw a lovely solo try by Josh Pankhurst from 30m out, when from a scrum in midfield wide on the right, fullback Jason Smith created the initial break and quick ball to Pankhurst at pace, sliced through the opposition defence to crash through the last defenders for a try next to the posts. Pitkin predictably added the extras and the lead was 24-0.

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The closing minutes of the half saw Bridgnorth start to gain some momentum, although without really threatening the Maidstone line, but two penalties 30m in front of the posts about saw Bridgnorth's Will Biddell demonstrated his ability with the boot as he reduced the scoreline to 24-6 at the break, with his second kick the last act of what had been a thrilling first half display by the Kent club.



Maidstone stuttered slightly in the early period of the second half as unforced errors disrupted the fluency that had been so apparent in the first half and they struggled to get out of their half. When they finally did they managed to force their way into the Bridgnorth 22m. A resultant scrum wide on the right saw the defending side penalised and a quick tap by Mike Werahiko caught the Bridgnorth defence napping as he fed Eddie Cranston to cross from 5m out and 15m in from the touchline. With Pitkin adding the extras Maidstone were 31-6 to the good with half an hour to play. Having started to ring the changes from the reserves bench Maidstone thought they had scored again on the 15 minute mark, as skipper Ben Williams burrowed over after a period of pressure on the opposition line, only for the referee to adjudge a double movement.

As the match went into the final quarter Bridgnorth rallied and throwing caution to the wind began to apply pressure of their own although the Kent club's defence stood firm, first denying Calum Madden in the corner. With just over 10 minutes remaining Maidstone's defence



was finally breached as Bridgnorth used the close range driving maul to good effect after several attempts, with their skipper Dan Griffiths getting the touchdown. With Biddell unable to add the extras Bridgnorth were now in double figures as with the scoreline at 31-11. He was on the scoresheet just minutes later though, adding his side's second try with a powerful burst after another strong driving maul. He then added the conversion to reduce the deficit still further to 31-18 going into the closing stages.

Whilst the remaining time meant that a comeback was not on the cards, Maidstone had enough composure to play the dying minutes of game in the right area of the pitch and to slow the tempo sufficiently to run the clock out.

In summary, as coach Paul Hathaway commented "We came here knowing the pressure of the occasion on a lot of players was going to be immense, but we asked them to try and keep cool heads, try and keep control of the game and keep the tempo up and I couldn't have asked for a better start". The team certainly did that as they overpowered previously undefeated Bridgnorth in the first half before having to maintain their composure in withstanding a late fightback.



**Maidstone:** Williams(C), McKenzie, Byford, Brill, Iles M, Pankhurst, Cranston, Werahiko, Pitkin, Skelton, Morosan, Perigo, Newton, Eastwood, Smith. **Replacements:** Debnam, Bunyan, Iles J, Davies, Lee, Caborn, Clark.



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