



Match Report



London Division 2 (South East)

Crowborough RFC 17 v Maidstone FC 30

Played at Steel Cross, Crowborough, Saturday 13th Sept, 2014



Crowborough's Steel Cross Ground is never an easy venue, in the corresponding fixture last season, played on a cloying pitch at the end of October; the Crows were one of the few sides to deny Maidstone a winning bonus point. However, this opening day encounter played under different conditions, far more suited to Maidstone's 'all court' style was an entirely different affair. After last season there were a number of doubters who felt that Maidstone couldn't close out the tough games but the county town side demonstrated all the grit required to overturn a 10-point first half deficit against determined opposition, to run out convincing winners, despite never really playing at their best.



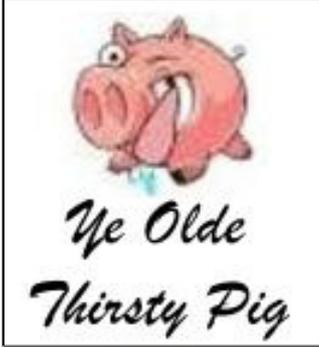
After last week's convincing Kent Cup win, Head Coach Paul Hathaway made a number of changes, Aaron Bishop and debutant Matt Davies came in on the flanks for the injured Eddie Cranston and Lawrence Brown, with last week's hat-trick hero, James Douglas on the wing for Alex Eastwood and Brad Ford starting at Fly-Half.

Much of the early encounters were in midfield, with Maidstone lacking some of last week's cohesion and turning over possession far too readily to an eager Crowborough side that were really up for the encounter. It was a break from midfield by Josh Pankhurst, supported by Jonno Skelton that created the first real pressure in the Crowborough 22m, but a lack of precision and the inability to create quick recycled ball saw that early foray fizzle out. In fact Crowborough were first on the scoreboard midway through the



first quarter, with Maidstone penalised on their own 22m, the Crowborough full back Matt Tyler made no mistake with the kick to nudge the home side ahead. The home side stretched their lead on 26 minutes, following a failed kick to touch by Maidstone, Crowborough built a period of concerted pressure culminating in a jinking run from scrum-half

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Atkin to touchdown next to the posts, with the extras a mere formality for Tyler to give the home side a 10-0 lead.

Despite forays from penetrating runs by skipper Ben Williams and Jamie Perigo, it wasn't until the closing minutes of the half that Maidstone eventually registered a score of their own; the visitors eventually started to string some phases of play together and a trademark Ben Brill run after picking up from the base of a ruck saw him touchdown just to the left of the posts, with Pitkin adding the conversion. Maidstone were probably unlucky not to have ended the half with another try as centre Perigo broke into the Crowborough 22m and fed winger James Douglas, with a last ditch tackle by Sansbury preventing the try, but in the dying seconds of the half a Crowborough infringement saw Pitkin convert a penalty for the sides to turn round all square.



The second half saw Maidstone start much the better, keeping Crowborough penned in their own 22m; attacks down the Crowborough left flank by Douglas and skipper Williams kept the home side pinned on their line and with quick recycled ball fed Pankhurst running on at pace to wrong foot the defence and cross by the posts after 5 minutes, and with the match

still finely balanced the eminently kickable conversion was charged down by the home side.

From the restart Maidstone put themselves under pressure, with the ball being spilled giving Crowborough a scrum in good field position on the visitors 22m. From this attacking platform the Crowborough No8 Botterman picked up from the base, and faced with some weak tackling was able to canter in under the posts to restore the home sides lead. As the quarter drew to a close, Maidstone pressure was beginning to tell on the home sides defence, with their penalty count increasing. With Pitkin converting the only kickable opportunity to give the visitors a 1-point lead, a further infringement then saw try scorer Botterman yellow carded.



Coach, Hathaway than startled to explore his options, with Matt Iles replacing Aaron Bishop and Luke Debnam on for Joel Byford in the front row. With some fresh legs and a numerical advantage Maidstone applied pressure and the result was almost immediate, with the forwards driving deep into the home 22m, quick ball saw Perigo on hand to touchdown under the posts with Pitkin adding the extras to extend the lead to 8-points.



Maidstone now had the upper hand and with a tiring Crowborough side now playing 'catch up' rugby, the visitors were able to contain the threat posed by the home team. The loose game now being played by Crowborough created its own opportunities for Maidstone and the closing stages saw some penetrating runs by Brill, Williams, Morosan and Douglas, but it was Matt Iles that

capped off the Maidstone performance with a robust run at the heart of the home defence that brought the bonus point score, as he crossed wide on the right; Pitkin was unable to add the extras with Maidstone running out 17-30 winners at the final whistle.

In summary, Maidstone's performance was something of a 'curate's egg' with obvious elements of ring rust; but with players still unavailable or injured in what is looking like a deep senior squad, the cohesiveness required will develop as the weeks progress. As they proved in this encounter, even when not at their best, they are still going to be a tough side to beat.



Maidstone: Williams, Pankhurst, Byford, Hadi, Iles J, Davies, Bishop, Brill, Pitkin, Ford, Morosan, Perigo, Skelton, Owen. **Replacements:** Debnam, Iles M, Przemski.

