



Match Report



London Division 2 (South East)

Maidstone FC 32 v Deal & Bettleshanger RFC 3

Played at The Mote, Maidstone, Saturday 13th Dec, 2014



After last week's high of what was an expected convincing local derby win, this week saw the side back at The Mote for what was always going to be a far more competitive affair to complete the first half of the season's league campaign.

Deal & Bettleshanger have had an inconsistent start to their campaign this term, but a run of form since early November has seen them steadily climb up the standings and into the top half of the table and they possess an all-round playing style that can cause most teams problems. However, by the final whistle Maidstone had put in a convincing enough performance with three tries in the last quarter of the match, to run out 32-3 winners; bringing to an end their opponents recent winning streak, and reaching the halfway mark in the campaign, having dropped only a solitary bonus point.



A midweek training injury to 2nd Row Nick Bunyan meant that as he has every week this season, Head Coach Paul Hathaway had to make changes to the starting XV, with Matt Iles returning to partner brother James in the tight five. The only other change to the match day squad was on the bench, where Ollie Newton following his return from Hartpury College and Swindon RFC, was alongside Will Fox and Neil Graves

In what was a game of two halves; the first saw contrasting styles and tight defences cancel each other out with the only points on the scoreboard coming from penalty kicks. With a solid set piece and aggressive defensive play Deal seemed happy in the first half to kick for territory and look to launch attacks from inside their opponents 22m. By contrast, after the initial few minutes of the game, Maidstone were much happier playing with the ball in hand and relying on their powerful runners to attack from deep; and whilst they tended to look the more threat-



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ening of the two sides in this period, they lacked continuity and composure in their play at the critical points to capitalise on the breaks created.

The visitors were first on the scoreboard when Maidstone were penalised for obstructing the opposition kicker and a 35m penalty from Connor Moss gave Deal an early 0-3 advantage after five minutes. Apart from a solitary break from their own half by Jamie Perigo and Jonno Skelton, Maidstone spent much of the first quarter struggling to get out of their own half, with a mounting penalty count contributing significantly to Deal's ability to sustain pressure. At the end of the quarter the first real period of continuity the home side were able to string together following a break by Mike Werahiko, who was

to pick up the Man of the Match award for his efforts, saw Deal penalised and Nick Childs converting the penalty to level the scores. Maidstone were beginning to get into their stride and a poor defensive kick by Deal on the 25 minute mark saw Maidstone's back line achieve some real penetration, and whilst the visitors were able to stem the flow, the referee adjudged that they had infringed and Childs gratefully accepted the points on offer from in front of the posts to take a lead that they would not relinquish for the remainder of the match.

Maidstone's propensity to run the ball from their own 22m did afford Deal the opportunity exert a sustained period of pressure on the Maidstone line towards the end of the half, but a solid kept them at bay as the half-time whistle sounded.

Early season fixtures had seen Maidstone post scores early in the match, but latterly their performances have seen a strong second half performance and this encounter followed the same trend with Maidstone consistently exerting pressure throughout the half. The early minutes saw Deal forced into making changes to their line-up, with both Elsam and Popeanu replaced, they received a further setback in the eighth minute when skipper Adam Michael was yellow carded for a deliberate knock on when Maidstone looked certain to score down the left flank. The resultant penalty saw Maidstone kick to the corner and after a couple of forward drives from the lineout, the ball was moved wide with James Douglas on the end of the last pass to touchdown in the right corner.

Maidstone could have put the match out of reach during the Deal skipper's absence when another good attack saw Douglas spill the ball as he went over the line; and Eddie Cranston was deemed to have knocked on as he touched down short while later. With

the home side beginning to 'turn the screw' and all of the play in the Deal half, Maidstone began to ring the changes with Fox, Graves and Newton joining the fray for Byford, Lamb and McPherson, with Lucien Morosan moving into the scrum-half berth.

Maidstone increased their advantage early in the final quarter when a break by Van de Velde was



carried on by Newton who was hauled down just short of the line, panic in the Deal defence saw them attempt to hack the ball clear, only to fall at the feet of the grateful Perigo to cross in the left corner, an excellent conversion by Childs saw the lead extended to 18-3. With five minutes of the match remaining, a loose defensive clearance by Deal to relieve pressure was fielded by Maidstone on halfway line, with the counter attack led by Graves who drove into the opposition 22m, the ball was fed wide with Newton the recipient to cross in the left corner; another excellent kick by Childs took the score to 25-3.



With time running out the home side were now hunting for the bonus point, and a penalty awarded in the last minute saw them kick for touch and the resultant line out. Maidstone had saved the pick of their scores till last to secure the bonus point; after a couple of attempts by the forwards the ball was swung wide, with left wing Newton having joined the line to create the extra man, he was able to feed Douglas to cross in the corner for his second score, the successful conversion was the last kick of the match with the home side convincing 32-3 winners.



In summary, Maidstone won this game through the continuity and fluidity of their second half play; having weathered any first half pressure from the visitors. In this mode they are a difficult side to beat, although the penalty count at times may be a concern and at times they may need to vary their exit strategies when under pressure.

With a clear gap now opening at the top of the league, and with Medway now looking like the main challengers Maidstone are approaching that part of the season where the spoils will be decided. Whilst this is only the halfway stage in the campaign, the side appear to have learnt from last season's disappointing experience and as long as they hold their nerve

and resolve, they could well go one better than last season's runner up spot.

Maidstone

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

