



Match Report



London Division 2 (South East)

Deal & Betteshanger RFC 8 v Maidstone RFC 20

Played at The Drill Field, Deal, Saturday 28th March, 2015



As was the case in the first half of the season, following last week's demolition of near neighbours Aylesford; Maidstone were confronted with a different proposition as they travelled to face a Deal & Betteshanger outfit that are always a tough nut to crack on their home territory.

Deal & Betteshanger have had a relatively consistent season and their results probably reflect their mid-table league position, having largely lost to the sides above them and defeated those below them in the league. They possess a tough and uncompromising playing style that creates problems for most opposing sides and whilst the league remains the priority for the county town club, with an eye on next week's cup fixture this was probably the awkward type of fixture they required in preparation for that. By the final whistle Maidstone, whilst having not put together their most fluent of performances, they had done what they needed to do with two clinically taken tries in the 10 minutes before half-time, in order to take the points.

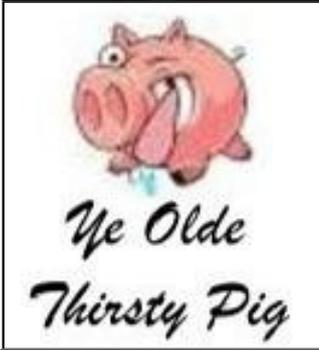


Head Coach Paul Hathaway yet again rang the changes as players returning from injury required game time and those with niggling injuries were rested where possible. In the front row Will Fox partnered Luke Debnam and Josh McKenzie, whilst the settled 2nd Row Iles partnership remained. The back row was again reshuffled with Ben Brill returning at No8 and Eddie Cranston and Josh Pankhurst on the flanks. The side fielded the same back division as the previous week with a bench comprising of Lenny Van der Velde, Joel Byford and skipper Ben Williams.



The match was played in dry conditions but with a bitter westerly wind that was to create problems for both sides when kicking from hand. This was demonstrated with the opening kick-off when Caborn's kick was adjudged

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not to have travelled the requisite 10m, with the resultant scrum Deal were handed the upper hand very early on. Some good play off the scrum saw them advance to the Maidstone 22m, and whilst the visitors looked to have contained the initial Deal assault, the referee penalised them for offside and the Deal flyhalf converted the penalty to give the home side a 3-0 lead inside two minutes.



The next period of play saw Maidstone looking to get into their game and inject some tempo into their play, and whilst at times there were flashes of the form they have shown all season, their game seemed to stutter and lacked some of its normal continuity. However



a penalty on the Deal 22m at the 10 minute point saw Maidstone draw level with Caborn taking the three points on offer, but not before both sides lost a second row each to the 'bin' for a brief scuffle as James Iles and the Deal No4 were given 10 minutes to cool off.

Large periods of the half were played out in midfield, with both sides creating openings, although neither quite able to maintain the level of continuity to press their advantage as the cover defence from both sides held sway. Deal did take the lead at the end of the first quarter as they managed to exert a period of pressure down the left flank, and with good ball retention able to force their way over 10m in from the left touchline, a good conversion attempt against the blustery wind was unlucky to hit the post, but the hosts now had an 8-3 lead.

With both sides now restored to full complement Deal continued to press, and an attack, again down the left flank saw Cranston's covering tackle adjudged as high and meriting a yellow card from the referee which reduced them to 14 again. Deal were unlucky not to score as a consequence, when having opted for the scrum from the penalty, they spilled the ball as they breach the Maidstone line.



With skipper Williams now on and the scrum more stable Maidstone started to lift the tempo of their game, and whilst still with a man deficient were able to work their way out of defence. A penalty against Deal for not releasing on the half hour, saw Maidstone pounce, a quick tap by Morosan inside their own half released Perigo who fed Skelton and with the deal cover defence committed winger Smith cut inside from 22m out to cross under the posts to level the scores. Caborn predictably added the extra points and Maidstone now had an 8-10 lead that they wouldn't relinquish.

Despite Deal continuing to cause problems; with some good ball retention and the ability



to move the ball wide through their back division, it was Maidstone that were next on the scoreboard 5 minutes before the break. In what was almost a carbon copy of their first try, a quick tap penalty saw them break out of defence with winger Smith feeding fullback Douglas in support to cross 15m in from the left touchline, a good conversion by Caborn and Maidstone were beginning to gener-

ate some fluidity to their play and look more comfortable at 8-17 going into the interval.

The second half followed much the same vein as the first with both sides unable to find the continuity to sustain attacks once in the opposition 22m. Deal had an early opportunity following a hack on that led to a scrum under the Maidstone posts, but were subsequently penalised and Maidstone broke away through Perigo and Van der Velde. Whilst the attack eventually came to nought, Deal were penalised and a Caborn penalty in front of the posts took the



lead to 8-20 and completed the afternoon's scoring with the bulk of the second half still to play. Another set of 'handbags' a couple of minutes later saw the Deal No5 receive a yellow card although Maidstone were unable to capitalise as the hosts were forced into a string of changes as almost every passage of play resulted in some form of injury and interrupted the flow of the match.

With sufficient of a points cushion Maidstone appeared content absorb Deal pressure going into the final quarter and look to counter whenever turnover ball was available. A break at the midpoint in the half by Cranston took the visitors deep into Deal territory, supported by Van der Velde the ball was moved wide to the left but with Douglas spilling the ball in the tackle with the line practically at his mercy. With ten minutes remaining another opportunity went begging as the final pass to winger Eastwood on the overlap was poor and probably a summary of the visitor's afternoon.

The closing minutes of the match saw Deal looking for the score to pick up a losing bonus point and applying pressure camped on the Maidstone line, but some resolute defence held them at bay until they turned the ball over and looked to counter. With the attack fizzling out the referee brought the match to a conclusion with Maidstone 8-20 winners.

In summary, this was a stop start match interrupted by errors and injuries, such that it never really got going. Whilst still entertaining to watch the staccato nature of the game was as frustrating for the players as it was the spectators. Whilst Maidstone were probably good value for the points, as they looked to inject more tempo into the match, on the two occasions that mattered they demonstrated that 'it's not how long you have the ball, but how clinical is your execution when in possession'. Maidstone now look forward to two big fixtures on home territory, with next week's cup semi-final and an opportunity to secure the league title the following week when they host Crowborough.

Maidstone: Fox, McKenzie, Debnam, Iles J, Iles M, Cranston, Brill, Pankhurst, Morosan, Caborn, Smith, Perigo, Skelton, Eastwood, Douglas. **Replacements:** (All Used) Williams ©, Byford, Van der Velde..

