



Match Report



RFU Intermediate Cup
London & SE Regional Semi-Final
Diss RFC 7 v Maidstone FC 33

Played at Mackenders, Diss, Norfolk, Saturday 14th Feb 2015



This regional semi-final saw two sides with enviable records pitted against one another as unbeaten Maidstone travelled to face Norfolk club Diss, currently heading London 2(NW) and boasting a proud unbeaten home record this season. Whilst the 7-33 scoreline may appear to make the match up look less than close, this encounter was hard fought and saw a distinct contrast in styles between the two sides. The hosts with a distinctly forward orientated game plan against the high tempo running style of the visitors.



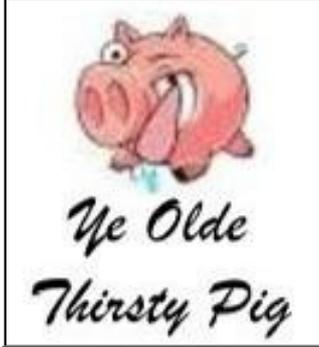
For substantial periods of this match the Diss pack continued to hammer at the 'castle gate' of Maidstone's defences, with the only breach coming when the visitors were reduced to 14 following a yellow card. Maidstone on the other hand, preferred to move the ball, varying their point of attack and probing for weaknesses in the Diss ramparts, ruthlessly exploiting any breaches.

Head Coach Paul Hathaway was able to select from a settled squad with the only changes being a rotation of the starting XV, and with Matt Davies unavailable Jack Lamb returned to the bench alongside Joel Byford, Lucien Morosan and the addition of Ben Pitkin.



With the match played in overcast but dry conditions on a pitch that had drained well despite the recent rain it was the hosts, with a good crowd behind them, that as expected looked to gain the early impetus as their forwards looked to dominate the early exchanges. Maidstone's main focus was to weather the initial storm, settle into the game and quieten the home crowd. Playing with the benefit of a slight but noticeable slope Maidstone achieved

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their aim and three first half tries; two in quick succession just before the interval, gave them sufficient breathing space to weather an onslaught from the home pack in the early stages of the second period.

After the initial exchanges it was apparent that the Diss strengths lay in their forwards, and whilst the visitors held their own in most areas of the game, they struggled to contain a strong home pack in the set scrum throughout the match. Maidstone however looked the more inventive and penetrative of the two sides as the game settled down and the end of the first quarter saw Maidstone deep in the Diss 22m and despite losing a 5m scrum in front of the posts they managed to regain possession of the ball with Mike



Werahiko and Van de Velde making inroads into the Diss defence and Nick Childs on hand for the scoring pass to touchdown just to the right of the posts; with the conversion a formality Maidstone had weathered the early storm to take a 0-7 lead and quieten the home crowd.

The restart saw the visitors put themselves under pressure with Diss then spurning a kickable penalty to go for the lineout in the corner. Solid defensive work by Maidstone saw them clear their lines and a good chase of the clearing kick, which was to be a feature of their game throughout, saw them back in Diss territory.

The half hour saw Diss apply their first real pressure on the Maidstone line, and combined with the loss of skipper Ben Williams, forced to leave the pitch through injury and Ben Brill for treatment following a blow to the head; the side showed solid defence and discipline to keep their try line intact. Having held the Diss attackers at bay they were able to subsequently turn the ball over, with Jamie Perigo breaking from the 22m to the halfway line before feeding the supporting players with a knock on halting the play on the Diss 22m. With Diss making an error in clearing their lines, a lineout on the home 22m saw another attacking opportunity as the loose forwards drove forward before the ball was released to the backs, with Lenny Van de Velde unlucky to knock on in the tackle 2m out, with the try line beckoning.



The closing minutes of the half saw a Nick Childs penalty attempt drift to the right of the posts but the resultant 22m restart by Diss was poor as Olly Newton initiated the attack with Brill on



hand to carry the ball into the Diss 22m and feed Van de Velde to cross under the posts, Childs added the extras and Maidstone looked like taking a 14-point advantage into the interval. The restart looked like Maidstone had put themselves under pressure again, but some good defensive work forced Diss backwards, eventually forcing the error for a Maidstone scrum on the Diss 22m. With the half going into add-

ed time the visitors then struck a crucial blow as they moved the ball from the scrum, good interplay between Jonno Skelton and Perigo, with Van de Velde as the decoy runner saw Skelton in under the posts. Childs added the extras and the visitors had the boost of a 21-point cushion. They almost struck again from the restart as a storming run from 2nd Row James Iles took play 50m up the pitch, quick ball was moved from the resultant ruck but the final pass to Douglas was judged forward with the line beckoning in what was the last meaningful attack of the half.



Playing with the slope of the pitch the opening encounters of the second half saw Diss keeping the ball in the forwards with No8 Laurie their 'go to' to man putting them on the front foot. Whilst Maidstone held them at bay for the opening minutes as they looked to grind their way down the pitch applying a sustained period of pressure, eschewing a series of eminently kickable penalties in favour of the set scrum. Maidstone eventually managed to clear their lines and a good chase of Skelton's kick by Alex Eastwood and James Douglas had Diss fullback Ludkin under pressure but a kind bounce rescued the situation and put Diss back on the attack. Maidstone were then reduced to 14 as Byford received a yellow card from referee Matt Rozier for one too many team penalties. Camped on the Maidstone line the difference told in the fifteenth minute as they drove a 5m scrum with scrum-half Burroughs getting the touchdown to the left of the posts and Peacock adding the extras to reduce the deficit to 7-21.



Any thoughts of a Diss comeback were quickly answered, from the restart Diss looked to attack down the right touchline, a chip ahead was fielded and quickly recycled, the initial break by hooker Josh Pankhurst fed Ben Brill, who from 50m out and with support outside him was able to wrong-foot the cover defence to cross to the right of the posts, with Childs adding the extras the 7-28 scoreline restored the Maidstone advantage.

The home side were by no means out of the contest and continued to attack, with time now drifting away they looked to bring their backs more into the game, but as they had done all match the Maidstone defence had pretty much shut down the midfield channel as a viable attacking avenue for the home side.

As Byford returned the Maidstone scrum lost Luke Debnam through injury and Coach Hayward introduced Lamb, Morosan and Pitkin for Debnam, Eastwood and Childs. The closing stages of the match demonstrated the difference between the two sides, with Diss having had the lion's share of play and second half pressure and much of Maidstone's possession having been in midfield, with one of their few forays into the Diss 22m they



were incisive in their execution as a Byford drive saw ball tidied up by Perigo with Werahiko and Van de Velde then combining before acting skipper Josh Pankhurst received the final pass to score 10m to the left of the posts, whilst the conversion unluckily hit the post the 7-33 scoreline had effectively killed the game off.

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VISITORS		33	
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In summary, this was probably the most mature Maidstone performance of the season as they defended solidly for long periods and implemented their exit strategies effectively when under pressure. With ball in hand they always looked threatening as they maintained their tempo, perhaps their only disappointment will be in the opportunities they failed to execute in a contest where the margin of victory could well have been greater despite being 'under the cosh' for large periods of the match

Maidstone: Williams(C), Pankhurst, Debnam, Iles, Bunyan, Werahiko, Cranston, Brill, Childs, Skelton, Newton, Perigo, Van de Velde, Eastwood, Douglas. **Replacements:** (All used) Byford, Lamb, Morosan, Pitkin,