



Match Report



RFU Intermediate Cup, 2nd Round

Maidstone FC 31 v Harrow RFC 15

Played at The Mote, Maidstone, Saturday 8th Nov, 2014



With Warlingham having conceded in the last round, this was a first outing for the county town club in this season's RFU Cup competition as they faced a Harrow side that has a very similar playing profile to Maidstone's over recent seasons. With a good cup run this season being one of the team's objectives; achieving that will mean taking on the better and more ambitious sides within the four London 2 divisions, and with the visitors currently heading the table in London 2(NW) this was set to be the sides sternest test so far this season.

However, what should have ended up a straightforward win didn't end up as such, with errors from two restarts by the home side providing the visitors with opportunities to build pressure and subsequently score that they should never have been afforded.



Last week's convincing league encounter against Colfeians was thought to have been the last experience of ideal conditions for expansive free flowing rugby, but despite the onset of the wet weather the pitches have held up well and the ground underfoot was firm enough for an expansive game for any team that had the will to exploit it.

Injury and unavailability meant Coach Paul Hathaway had to make a few changes, these were mainly in the forwards, with Eddie Cranston keeping the hooker berth that he occupied for the latter part of last week's league match. Nick Bunyan made his first start in the 2nd Row for the unavailable Ian Lee whilst the back row saw Jack Lamb and Matt Davies occupy the flanks. In the backs James Douglas replaced injured Lucien Morosan on the wing. On the bench were Luke Debnam, Alex Przyjemski and the returning Neil Graves with Euan Caborne coming into the squad for his first appearance this season.



As in previous games this season Maidstone started brightly and exerted the early pressure, although too many early penalties allowed Har-



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row to clear their lines. It was towards the end of the first quarter that Maidstone started to put together some coherent passages of play with the score coming from a lineout on the visitors 22m being driven up in midfield by the backs and then taken on by the forwards with Joel Byford able to burrow over the line 15m in from the left touchline: Nick Childs added the extra points and it looked like the Maidstone juggernaut was on the roll.



A poor fielding of the restart saw Harrow respond almost immediately; having been gifted field position a series of drives saw the visitors make ground with a missed tackle on hooker Baragwanath being all he needed to build momentum and cross midway out on the right for an unconverted try. With the ball going directly into touch from the restart Harrow were on the offensive again and able to build a period of pressure inside the Maidstone half. A clearance kick from outside the 22m that went straight into touch was the precursor to Harrow's second try, as they looked to capitalise on the lineout. A good catch and the ball driven up infield saw the Harrow skipper West



running on at pace to receive an inside pass from scrum-half Conroy and cut through the defence for the try under the posts, fullback Whitney added the extras and Maidstone found themselves 7-12 in arrears after 30 minutes and this was further compounded when Whitney converted a 40m penalty to extend their lead to 7-15 shortly afterwards.

Maidstone appeared to lose the fluidity of their play as Harrow, with a significant size advantage in the tight five and holding the lead looked to slow the game down and the match became a stop-start affair with no real continuity, also creating a degree of frustration. An episode of 'handbags' saw both sides reduced to 14 men with Harrow's Harrison and the home side's Byford both shown yellow cards, but as the half drew to a close Maidstone started to regain the upper hand.



The second half saw Harrow regularly kicking from deep to clear their lines with Maidstone the sharper of the two sides and scoring 26 unanswered points to take the tie. The first came after six minutes with Alex Eastwood fielding a poor clearance and feeding fullback Childs who slipped tackles until he was hauled down, quickly recycled ball saw Jamie Perigo and skipper Ben Williams take the ball forward before Matt Davies received the final pass with work still to do from 30m out, to cross midway out on the left to reduce the deficit to 12-15. Maidstone also started to ring the changes; Debnam had already left the field injured and Davies's score was his last act in the match with Neil Graves now entering the fray on the back row. Graves initiated the next score midway through the third quarter as he picked up from the base of a midfield scrum to then feed the back division, with Childs coming into the line wide on the right to cross in the cor-



ner for the hosts to retake the lead 17-15. Maidstone closed out the quarter with a good 30m penalty conversion from Childs to increase their advantage to 20-15 and an even longer range penalty followed five minutes later to increase the advantage.

With a substantial period of stoppage time to be added Maidstone kept the pressure applied, with winger James Douglas fielding a clever chip through the defence to cross 15m in from the right touchline. An offence by the defending side saw Maidstone restart with a penalty and a further Harrow infringement then saw Child slot his third kick to complete the afternoons scoring.



The match wasn't quite over as Harrow then looked to get a consolation score in what was probably their first venture into the Maidstone 22m during the second half, whilst Maidstone defended solidly, Nick Bunyan was deemed to have infringed cynically and spent the dying minutes in the 'sin bin', although it was the home side that still looked the most dangerous as they sought to turn the ball over and break out of defence; and the final seconds of the match saw Maidstone again camped on the Harrow line.

In summary, Maidstone can look at two points in the match that gave Harrow a foothold in the game, but it was the stop-start nature of the second quarter that inhibited aspects of their performance. Once they regained the fluidity and tempo to their game to move the opposition's big forwards around the park, their direct running meant they always had the ascendancy.

Maidstone: Williams, Cranston, Byford, Bunyan, Iles J, Davies, Lamb, Iles M, McPherson, Skelton, Eastwood, Perigo, Van der Velde, Douglas, Childs. **Replacements (all used):** Debnam, Graves, Przyjemski, Caborne.

