



Match Report



London Division 2 (South East)

Medway RFC 14 v Maidstone FC 14

Played at Priestfields, Rochester, Saturday 31st January, 2015



The recent history of games between these two teams would indicate a close and tense encounter and this one did not disappoint. With a 14-14 draw the outcome, neither side's chances were harmed in the promotion stakes. However, it was Maidstone that left the arena with a sense of loss, as this game was theirs with ten minutes to go. Once again, when the chips were down, they were tactically, outmanoeuvred by an otherwise, inferior side.

With snow flurries a constant menace, the temperature hovering just above freezing and a strong gusting wind, this was not the day for faint hearts or fancy rugby. A heavy pitch that cut up as the afternoon progressed indicated this was an afternoon for a kicking fly half and territorial supremacy, which was to the home team's advantage. And so it proved as the game unfolded.



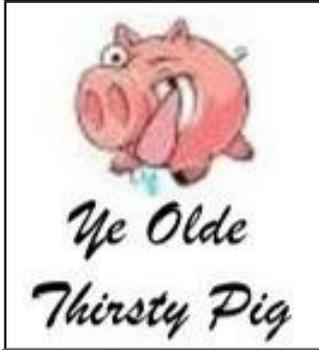
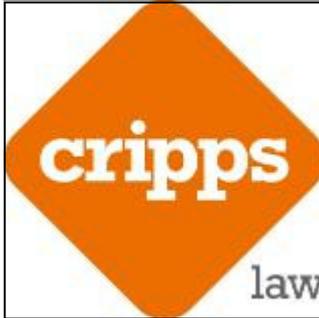
Using a scorecard of rugby ability, Maidstone could claim to have superiority in every department. But tactical nous has proved their undoing in the past and it did so again on this occasion.

After a resounding victory in the Kent Cup, last week, over opponent's two leagues higher, there were no surprising changes to the starting line-up. Only Jack Lamb's unavailability saw Nick Bunyan drafted into the second row, with the back row reshuffled to see Ben Brill at No. 8 and Mike Werahiko moving to the blind side. The policy of alternate starts at tight-head saw Joel Byford start and Luke Debnam on the bench. In summary, this was a full Maidstone side.



The game's opening period saw the playing philosophy of both sides laid out for all to see. Maidstone ran the ball at every opportunity, while Medway kicked for the corners and tried to play their rugby in the Maidstone half. With

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the wind at his back, Medway fly half, Harvey, used his prodigious kick at every opportunity to gain ground and turn the Maidstone defence.

After Maidstone's initial flurry had stuttered, meeting a combination of strong defence and cold hands, Medway took the initiative and played consistently in the visitor's half. Penalties

took their toll, the first on five minutes and a second, just past the quarter hour, to give the hosts a 6-0 advantage, which they held until the half hour.

As soon as Maidstone realised that their physical superiority in the forwards could be



used to good effect, a sensible game plan, to match that of Medway's, emerged. On the back of this, Maidstone established good field position and began to exert their own pressure. A resultant penalty in the Medway 22, eminently kickable, or so it seemed, was spurned for a scrum. After the forwards attempted to batter their way across the

line, the ball was spun left for Ollie Newton to touch down wide on the left. With Nick Childs converting, Maidstone had taken the lead and restored credibility in their own capabilities.

But were they thinking clearly enough? With forty minutes on the clock, and their forwards camping in the Medway 22, a penalty was kicked to touch to try to repeat the previous strategy. But this time the line out was lost and with it, the chance to extend the lead.

The second half opened in much the same way as the first, with Medway quickly into their stride and Maidstone on the back foot. With try scorer, Newton, leaving the field after five minutes, having taken a knock, to be replaced by Alex Eastwood, it was the visitors that came back strongly, once again making ground through their forwards.



On the quarter hour, a penalty to Maidstone on the Medway 22 was punted to touch, fifteen metres from the line. And this time, a perfect catch and drive saw Maidstone extend their lead, with Pankhurst getting the touch down. Another fine conversion from Childs saw the lead extend to 14-6 and, with it, the body language of the home side took a turn for the worse.



Instead of playing a more conservative game, having established a significant lead, Maidstone tried to exert themselves through their normal running game and this allowed the home side back into the match. Medway, conversely, stuck to their game plan and, following a kick through to the Maidstone 22, a penalty for not rolling

away, saw Harvey reduce the deficit to five points.

With the half hour approaching, and Maidstone's defence looking secure, there should have been no way back for an increasingly desperate Medway. But over-ambition and minor hesitation in giving a pass, saw Medway flanker, Beaumont, intercept a Maidstone attack on the half way line. While he was hauled to the ground well short of the line, his well-timed inside pass saw centre, Tila, on hand to cross half way out.



With the scores now level, and ten minutes still on the clock, the conversion attempt by Harvey became a crucial kick and to see it come back off the far post raised Maidstone spirits once more.

And their chance for redemption came a few minutes later. Once again playing through the forwards, Maidstone took play into the Medway half and when the hosts were penalised just outside their 22, it seemed just the opportunity for Childs to go for goal. Instead, the decision was made to go for the line out and catch and drive. Unfortunately, the line out was lost, and with it the chance to regain the lead.



The momentum was now with the hosts and the remaining game time saw Maidstone defending their own line. As ever, there was a final twist, with Maidstone penalised just outside their own 22, deep into added time. Harvey's attempt was short and wide and with it went Medway's chance of pulling off an upset.

In the final analysis, a draw reflected the ebb and flow of the game. But there were lessons to be learned, which mirror past failings by Maidstone in season-defining games. The most fundamental is, surely, that using tactics which suit the condition is not a sign of weakness. If Maidstone had played more through their forwards, especially in the last quarter of the game, and denied the opposition the ball, as they are more than capable of doing, this could have resulted in a win. It wouldn't have been pretty but it would have been effective.

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

