

## Match Report



London Division 2 (South East)

Maidstone FC 38 v Thanet Wanderers RFC 8

Played at The Mote, Maidstone, Saturday 17th Jan, 2015



**M**aidstone returned to league action for the first time in almost a month with a solid and convincing win over against a mid-table Thanet Wdrs side that, have posed problems for some of the division's leading contenders. October's early season win against the East-Kent club was in many ways the encounter that saw the county town side really start to gel as a team.

Thanet are by no means slouches on the pitch, with a solid forward pack and some adventurous runners in the backs marshalled by veteran fly half Pete McCauley they certainly have the skills to exploit weaknesses in their opposition. Whilst they made few inroads into the home side's resilient defence, they remained competitive throughout this match, finally reaping their reward in the closing minutes.



In a match played on a bright winter afternoon on a greasy pitch that had required a late morning inspection, largely as a result of a heavy overnight frost rather than the heavy rain in the preceding week, this was unlikely to be the free flowing encounter of earlier in the season. With both sides having played little rugby in the preceding weeks, it was pleasing that both teams looked to move the ball throughout, and whilst this precipitated a number of handling errors, this promoted a match that once it gained momentum was a competitive encounter and as Maidstone enter a four week period that will go a long way to defining their season, it was perhaps the type of test that they required.

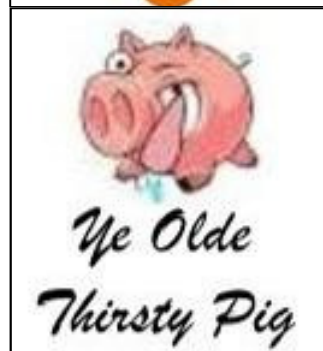
Maidstone's side featured few changes from the side that overcame Medway in the cup earlier in the month, Nick Bunyan started in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Row alongside James Iles, with Matt Davies joining the back row on the flank for the unavailable Jack Lamb. The back division was unchanged with the youthful back three of Alex Clark, Alex Eastwood and James Douglas retained, but most notably the bench saw both Ben Brill and Luke Debnam returning from long term injuries alongside Olly Newton.



Unlike the early season fixture it was Thanet that



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started brighter of the two sides, although errors by both sides meant the match lacked some fluidity. Errors and infringements by the home side handed the early initiative to the visitors with them capitalising after ten minutes with a penalty in from in front of the posts to take an early 3-point lead on ten minutes. This was probably the incentive that the home side needed as from the restart their game showed more cohesion and the initial impetus of the visitors was turned as Maidstone started to apply pressure. With the home side's set piece play in both the lineout and scrum functioning well they capitalised on this when from a lineout on the Thanet 22m after fifteen minutes they created the initial pressure and whilst the resultant drive was thwarted by a Thanet defence that worked hard throughout the match, the resultant scrum saw



scrum half Nick Childs make the initial drive for the line with Jamie Perigo on hand to dive over midway out on the left when the ball was quickly recycled. Childs added the extras in the first of six successful kicks during the match that would bring him the Man of the Match award, to give the home side a lead they would never relinquish.



The tide had now well and truly turned and Maidstone now spent most of the remainder of the half camped in the visitors 22m, however, in the damp conditions handling errors or infringements combined with Thanet's hard working defence kept the home side at bay. Even the loss of Matt Davies who was yellow carded on the half hour didn't reduce the home side's momentum and it was they that added to the score during his absence when Childs converted a penalty from in front of the posts to extend the lead to 10-3. Despite almost continuous pressure on the Thanet line by the home side for the remainder of the half, they were unable to breach what was proving to be a solid defence, although the high tackle count was to have its impact on their defensive ability in the latter stages of the match.

The interval saw Maidstone make the first of their changes, with Ben Brill on for Nick Bunyan in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Row and after a brief period of play in midfield Maidstone continued to apply the pressure. The fifth minute saw Thanet lose their hooker Clement to a yellow card and with Maidstone having the upper hand in the scrum it was a setback the visitors could ill afford. From the first scrum in his absence, and having sacrificed a back row player for a replacement front row player, Maidstone exploited the weakness, a scrum taken against the head saw Mike Werahiko picking up from the base of the scrum to make the initial drive and feed Brill in support on the inside channel to cross 15m in from the left touchline for a converted try and a 17-3 lead.



Shortly before Thanet were restored to a full complement Maidstone found themselves down a man as flanker Eddie Cranston was yellow carded for an offence at the breakdown with Thanet looking to break out of their own half. With no further score in the third quarter Maidstone made the second of their changes with Newton replacing left wing Clark and Debnam replacing Joel Byford in the front row.



It was early in the final quarter that Maidstone made their next break through, a period of concerted pressure that ended in Eastwood being held up by the Thanet defence resulted in a scrum in front of the visitors posts; another strike against the head and a good drive by the pack saw Werahiko pick up from the base to dive over



under the posts, with Childs on target again the lead was now 24-3.

Whilst salvaging something from the match was now probably beyond Thanet's reach, they still continued to defend manfully as the home side looked for the bonus point try, with runs by Douglas, Van de Velde, Eastwood and Newton all thwarted and a Perigo touchdown ruled out, it was the set piece that was again to provide the scoring opportunity. A scrum under the Thanet posts midway through the final quarter saw Werahiko again pick up from the base to move right; having committed the visitors defence he was able to feed the supporting Childs who beat the last man to touchdown 10m to the right of the posts to secure the bonus point.



The closing minutes saw Thanet apply their own pressure after the home side had conceded a penalty in their own 22m, whilst Maidstone were able to hold them at bay a poor clearance saw Thanet look to counter and as Maidstone infringed, the visitors kicked for the corner. Whilst the home side had stolen plenty of Thanet lineout ball, on this occasion the ball was secured and the subsequent drive gave the visitors a try in the left corner to narrow the deficit to 31-8.

MAIDSTONE F.C.	
PANKHURST CONTRACTING	
HOME	38
AWAY	08

With the outcome of the match already decided it would have been easy to just play out time, but Maidstone looked to hit back straight from the restart as they managed to regain possession, and in what was probably their best period of continuity, they were able to both move and recycle the ball quickly with skipper Ben Williams crossing to the left of the posts. The last kick of the match saw Childs complete a 100% afternoon with the boot as he added the extras for a final score of 38-8

In summary, Maidstone were largely dominant in the set piece throughout this match and despite a slow start always looked the more threatening of the sides in a match where the conditions were a major factor impacting on some of the basic skills. With their longer term injuries now returning to fitness, this opens up a number of options and potentially difficult selection decisions for the coaching team. A nice problem to have!

**Maidstone:** Williams, Pankhurst, Byford, Bunyan, Iles J, Cranston, Davies, Werahiko, Childs, Skelton, Clark, Perigo, Van de Velde, Eastwood, Douglas. **Replacements:** Brill, Debnam, Newton

