

Maidstone 3rd XV 54 vs. Thanet Wanderers Development XV 27

League: Invicta 3, Match 3

The Mote, Saturday 06th October. Kick-off 15:00

In their third game of the season, Maidstone played host to a Thanet Wanderers squad who were still looking for their first win of the 2012/13 campaign. Win two wins from two, Maidstone began the day in second place in the League behind Ashford, and a solid victory could see them go top.

Maidstone were determined to control the game from the start and even though there were several changes to the squad, the Maidstone line-up had experience, skill and pace all over the pitch.

With Thanet kicking off, Maidstone kept the ball tight to test the defensive capabilities of their opponents. The power of the Maidstone forwards kept the ball moving up the park. Playing in the Thanet defensive third, Maidstone were awarded a penalty to the left of the posts. The penalty drifted wide and Maidstone re-set themselves for the drop-out. Bizarrely the Thanet No 10 kicked the ball straight out rather than via a drop kick and the referee awarded Maidstone a scrum on the Thanet 22.

Maidstone won the scrum and Wilkie picked up from the back and moved deep into the 22. The ball was then passed to Mike Hill for him to run the ball in for the first score. Mike Laurensen slotted the conversion and Maidstone led 7-0.

Maidstone were well in control as Thanet hadn't had the chance to settle and from the resulting re-start Maidstone secured the ball. However a careless mistake allowed Thanet to gather the ball near the half way line. The ball was kicked back into the Maidstone 22 and an unfortunate bounce, and then an unlucky slip both contrived to prevent Maidstone full-back Ian Howson (Captains note : Unfortunately in front of his Father and two sons!! Vintage Howsen was soon back though, after a missed tackle anyway!!)from collecting, resulting in a simple pick up and touch down for the on-running Thanet player For the third game running Maidstone conceded after scoring, but were still leading 7-5.

Maidstone came right back at Thanet and within minutes of conceding Mike Hill make a break in midfield to run in his second try. Only fifteen minutes in and three tries already scored: 14-5.

Maidstone continued to dominate the game but Thanet's main attacking threat came through their No 12. Maidstone so often seem to be the source of so much of their own problems, and even though the Thanet centre was both powerful and skilful, it was poor tackling, followed by a dummy and side-step that allowed him to break the line and touchdown out wide. The four-point lead did not reflect the possession nor territory that Maidstone had exerted, but the defensive display of the home team was keeping the opposition in the game.

Again Maidstone pushed Thanet back deep into their 22 but were unable to force the ball over the line. Thanet, turning the ball over, shipped the ball to their No 10 to clear. The kick was fielded by David Ruaux on the wing who chipped the ball into space by the corner flag, and as the full back collected he was tackled into touch. With the lineout on the 5 metre line, Maidstone drove the ball over and Chris Morton touched down, re-establishing a 9 point lead.

Maidstone continued to pile forward and most of the play was being done in the Thanet defensive third. The forwards were in command at the breakdown with both solid offensive and defensive play. Combine that with powerful running from Jack Lamb, Martin Maytum and debutant Jay Pinnear-Saunders, the Thanet pack were hardly in the game. Excellent link play from Nick Jeary, returning at No 9 after injury, and Mike Laurenson at No 10, gave the back line plenty of the ball to attack with, and it was after a line break from Ian Howson that the next score was to come.

With Ian taking the ball on a trademark 30 metre run, Maidstone won a scrum out wide 30 metres from the Thanet line. With a blind side pickup from Wilkie causing havoc, some good forward interplay got the ball to Jack Lamb to run the final few metres in under the posts. Maidstone's fourth try of the afternoon and the 26-10 score line was starting to reflect the pattern of the game.

But again Maidstone let Thanet straight back in, and it was within minutes that Thanet scored their own third try to reduce the deficit to nine points. The No 12 again causing all the problems.

With less than five minutes left in the half, Maidstone would have another score, and with the forwards dictating all the attacking play, it was another scrum that would provide the platform. This time Wilkie, who had done some superb work throughout the half, was there to power over the line. Mike Laurenson added his fourth conversion and Maidstone went into the break leading 33-17.

Maidstone started the second half as they played the first; aggressive and pacy. Thanet upped their own game as well as they had already proved that they could force a score, and as each team started to tire there was always going to be more space as the game progressed.

With much of the play now between the two 10-metre lines, neither team had total control. But with around ten minutes gone, a sublime combination between Laurenson and Maidstone 12, Harry Stockford caught the Thanet defence completely wrong footed for the line-break. Harry then showed his pace to break a tackle and run in from 35 metres, giving Maidstone a comfortable twenty-three point margin.

For the first time in the game Thanet then applied some of their own pressure for a good ten minute spell. Maidstone were pushed back into their own defensive third with some well-placed tactical kicks and a failure to clear allowed Thanet to cross for their fourth try, bringing their own tally to 22 points.

Maidstone continued to be pinned back and Thanet were starting to be creative. Following a change at the Thanet No 10, Thanet won a line out and then a superb cross-field kick into the corner lead to a chase for both full-backs. With the ball in the Maidstone in-goal area, both full-backs stretched for the ball, and the referee blew for another Thanet score. In a remarkable show of sportsmanship and fair-play, the Thanet full-back spoke to the referee and informed him that he failed to ground the ball in-goal and that the decision should be over-turned. The referee accepted and awarded the drop-out.

Maidstone were now spending large parts of the game in their back-third but were finally showing some cohesive, organised defence. From another lineout in the Maidstone 22, Maidstone turned over the ball with a superb catch. Under pressure, Nick Jeary cleverly passed to David Ruaux on-hand to put in the clearing kick.

However, noticing that the Thanet back three were all out of position, the kick was put deep into the Thanet half rather than into touch. Chasing the ball, David kicked the ball forward out of the hands of firstly the Thanet full-back, and then the returning winger before either could gather, touching down for Maidstone's seventh try of the afternoon.

Straight from the re-start Maidstone won the ball and re-established the dominance they showed earlier in the game. Advancing up the park, Maidstone worked the ball around the forwards and backs well. Another clever kick forward had Thanet turning in defence and this time Ian Howson chased through to touch the ball down. With only a few minutes left in the game Maidstone now led by a 54-22 score line.

To their credit Thanet continued to attack and for the final few moments Maidstone were possibly guilty of thinking the game was done. A further handling mistake in the midfield was scooped up by the Thanet No 10 and run into the corner for the final score. Maidstone's margin of victory: 54-27.

Scoring eight tries – and seven conversions, Maidstone showed that their decision making in the attacking third has dramatically increased over the first two weeks, however Thanet managed to cross the whitewash five times. Maidstone's defensive frailties often come from a combination of poor communication and tackling and against stronger opposition this could cost them dearly. However with three wins from three and sky high confidence, the Mote is fast becoming a fortress where visiting teams know they will face a tough challenge to stop the home team.

This week's MOTM performance goes to Mike Hill for his excellent running with ball in hand, work rate in the loose and tackling. Hopefully his shoulder injury not prevent him playing against Aylesford in two weeks.

Squad:

Jay Pinnear-Saunders: Chris Morton: Mark Thurgood: Richard Gray: Martin Maytum: Mike Hill: Jack Lamb: Wilkie: Nick Jeary: Mike Laureson: Paul Murphy: Justin Evans: Harry Stockford: David Ruaux: Ian Howson: Tuggy: Elliot Hogan: Ross Laing