



Match Report



London Division 1 (South)

Maidstone FC 24 v Brighton RFC 20

Played at The Mote Saturday 19th March, 2016



These two teams have been contesting the mid-range positions of the table, all season, and a close encounter was expected. This was endorsed by the result in the away game, earlier in the season, when Brighton posted a 33-22 win, built on the back of a number of key Maidstone mistakes.

This time, Maidstone came out 24-20 victors and the win was the result of massive second half defensive effort that kept a resurgent Brighton at bay for much of the half.

With Jake Eaglesham, Ben Massey and Jack O'Connell unavailable, there were concerns that the forwards would be underpowered for this encounter. But this proved not to be the case, with replacements Rob Field, Adam Knight and Richie Bowen more than compensating, while the return of Rory Beech to fly half gave the back line a new look.

A cold easterly wind blew down the ground, from the park end, and this may have influenced the balance of play but, with a drying top surface, the underfoot conditions favoured fast, open rugby. And, on this score, both sides delivered.

But it was the defensive effort of the Maidstone fifteen that eventually delivered this victory. From a scoring perspective, this was a game of two halves, as Maidstone racked up all their points by the break and Brighton had to work extremely hard to earn the bonus points they managed to take from this game.



With only ten minutes gone, Maidstone were two tries to the good and looking to run Brighton off their feet. The first was posted after two minutes when, from a line out in mid-field, Richie Bowen popped up in the back line to take a Rory Beech pass and break a number of tackles before running clear on the 22 to score by the posts. Harry Millar



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duly slotted the conversion for an early seven point lead.

The second resulted from a scrum on the half way. This time it was Harry Millar that provided the creative spark by cutting inside and then releasing his centre partner, Craig Webb, for the score. Another routine Millar conversion saw Maidstone surge to a 14-0

lead with under ten minutes on the clock.

At this point, Brighton threw off any remaining travel related stiffness and came back strongly at the hosts. A ten minute spell of pressure by the visitors was ably defended by Maidstone and the quarter had gone before Maidstone looked threatening again.

But it was the visitors that posted the next score, on the half hour, when a break by second row, Watts, enabled Brighton an attacking position in the Maidstone 22. From the resulting line out, fly half, Cherry, slipped through the Maidstone cover to score by the posts.



What should have been a simple conversion was missed and the home crowd wondered how significant this miss might be by the end of the game.

Maidstone replied immediately with another try of their own. A line out, in the Brighton 22, set up a catch and drive routine and while the first thrust was thwarted, a further attempt saw Craig Webb in the mix to score. Another conversion by Millar took



the Maidstone lead to 21-5, with half time approaching.

But Brighton's revival was not complete. What seemed like a good Maidstone clearing kick was fielded by left-wing, Sowerby, and with Maidstone's follow up faltering, he released centre, Nesi, to find space down the left to score in the corner. Once again the conversion was missed and it

was the superior boot of Harry Millar that had the last say of the half, slotting a penalty opportunity just before the break, to leave the score at 24-10 at half time.

With the front eight performing well in scum and line out and the back line making breaks, this had been a good half for Maidstone. But Brighton had not given up on the game and started the second half at a ferocious pace.

And their efforts were rewarded after ten minutes of continuous attack. With Brighton



winning the ball back through a turnover in the Maidstone 22, right wing, Salmon, finished off a move in the corner to slice Maidstone's lead to 24-15. Once again, the conversion was missed but the momentum of the game was slipping, inexorably, toward the visitors.

Up to the half hour, it was one-way traffic as Maidstone defended while Brighton attacked. A yellow card for replacement Pankhurst, seconds after getting on the field, handed the advantage to the visitors and this put increasing strain on the depleted Maidstone resources. A second yellow card, for scrum half, Morosan, further reduced Maidstone's resources in this period, but do-or-die efforts by the rest of the team held the Brighton assault until the last play of the half.



A long range penalty attempt by Millar, just past the half hour, which would have given a larger cushion to their defensive efforts, drifted wide and Maidstone had to rely on the combined defensive effort of the team to keep the visitors at bay, which they did until the last minute. A penalty helped set up the Brighton attack in the Maidstone 22 and, from the resultant catch and drive, hooker, Coates, got the touch down in the corner to bring the final score to 24-20.

With the 'four tries' bonus, plus a further bonus point for being within seven points, Brighton came away with two points for their efforts, and this reflected the closeness of the encounter. Maidstone's inability to secure the fourth try and their own bonus, was a source of regret but should not detract from the team effort required to win this encounter.

Maidstone

Ben Williams; Will Massey; Andi Petalo: Hugh Cowan; Adam Knight: Jake Johnson; Richie Bowen; Rob Field: Lucian Morosan; Rory Beech: Tom Waring; Craig Webb; Harry Millar; Alex Eastwood: James Douglas

Replacements: Will Fox; Josh Pankhurst; Josh Smith (All used)

