



Match Report



London Division 1 (South)

Havant RFC 32 v Maidstone FC 42

Played at Hooks Lane, Havant ,Saturday 2nd April, 2016

This ten-try thriller waited until the last moments of the game to divulge the ultimate winner. Coming back from a nine point deficit, with barely ten minutes to play, underlined the determination and grit of this Maidstone side, who took the honours, 32-42.

With the lead changing hands six times, it was impossible to judge the outcome of this free-flowing game, played in ideal conditions on the South Coast, for most of the 80-minutes. With the sun shining on a large, flat pitch, firm underfoot, the prospect of challenging, open rugby was mouth-watering and both sides did their best to comply with the script.

With Jake Eaglesham back at No 8 and Jack O'Connell starting in the front row, the pack had a solid look about it and this was confirmed by the performance in the tight. The line out, with Hugh Cowan putting in a man-of-the-match performance, also performed well and together, these functions provided Maidstone an ample supply of ball.

In contrast, the back line, with Craig Webb unavailable, had a makeshift look about it, with Alex Eastwood moving in to the No 12 slot. But once the defensive alignments had been worked out and implemented, the pace available caused Havant continuous problems.

The hosts were the first to show their paces, when a break by flanker, Munden, took play to the Maidstone 22: from the resultant scrum, fly half, Sweeney, swept outside the Maidstone cover to score in the corner. Maidstone hit back immediately, with a Millar penalty, which was matched by Havant's, Knight, to lengthen their lead with ten minutes on the clock.

A second Millar penalty, on the quarter hour, cut the deficit to two points as Maidstone began to find their feet and, with a good set of moves establishing field position, another penalty, in the Havant 22, was, this time, punted to touch. The resultant catch and drive reaped the extra benefit of a try to Adam Knight and put Maidstone in the lead for the first time, at the end of the first quarter.

A yellow card for Harry Millar for not rolling away, a somewhat surprising decision for a technical offence when no warning had been given, led to a spate of tries that saw the lead change hands once more. The first went to Havant, by left wing, Blackburn, who finished off a move under the posts to give Knight an easy conversion. The second saw Richie Bowen touch down in the left corner, which James Douglas, converted to restore Maidstone's lead and the third, saw Havant's centre, Bamford, take advantage of a poor restart by Maidstone, to score by the posts to give an easy conversion, and restore a small Havant margin, 22-18.

With Millar back on the field just before the break, a measure of calm was restored and a wildly fluctuating game took a breather, allowing the coaching teams some time to address specific points of weakness. With hooker, Will Massey, nursing a dead-leg, Andi Petalo took to the field for the second half, along with Ben Massey, in the second row,



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to add his experience.

An early break by Munden threatened a repeat of the quick start Havant had made in the first half but this was repulsed and Maidstone began to exert their own pressure. But with ten minutes on the clock, with Maidstone having pushed Havant off their own ball, a Knight penalty allowed the hosts to increase their lead to 25-18.

A repeat move, once again pushing Havant off their own ball, saw Maidstone awarded the penalty and, once again, the adventurous option of a kick to touch in the Havant 22 was taken. While the initial catch and drive was held, recycling the ball saw Richie Bowen on the end of the move to reduce the deficit to 25-23.

The next ten minutes saw Havant piling pressure on Maidstone, with the visitors locked in their own 22, battling a series of line outs and drives to the line. The outcome was another yellow card, this time to Jake Eaglesham and, almost inevitably, Havant scored from the next line out.

While the initial drive was held, the ball was spun wide for hooker, Trail, to touch down under the posts to give Havant a 32-23 lead with fifteen minutes to play.

Once again, from a position of numerical weakness, Maidstone hit back. A break by Alex Eastwood took play deep into the Havant 22 and Hugh Cowan was on hand to finish the move. With Millar converting, the deficit was cut to two points, once more.

From the restart, Maidstone were quickly back into the Havant half, with Richie Bowen held up over the line. But this merely delayed the inevitable as, from the resultant scrum Eaglesham picked up at the base and crashed over. The Millar conversion established a five point cushion but with ten minutes to play there were no guarantees that this score would seal the outcome.

And Havant had no intention of rolling over. A handling error by Maidstone, in the Havant half, allowed the hosts to counter which took play back to the visitors 22 and further pressure back on the Maidstone line.

With Ben Williams having to leave the field with a sore ankle, hooker, Massey, was forced back into action for the final ten minutes of play. But it was the break out from his own line by Richie Bowen that finally sealed the game. While the scrambling Havant defence managed to halt the move, the ball was recycled and James Douglas finished off the move in the right corner to consolidate Maidstone's winning position.

While it would be easy to highlight some of the early defensive lapses committed by Maidstone and the poor organisation at Havant restarts, it was clear from this win that Maidstone were by far the superior team, judged by skill and application. No one could doubt the spirit shown to overcome two yellow cards and a significant points deficit, to conjure this win against a dogged Havant side, out to compensate for the defeat inflicted on them by Maidstone at The Mote earlier in the season.

Maidstone Ben Williams; Will Massey; Jack O'Connell: Hugh Cowan; Adam Knight: Jake Johnson; Richie Bowen; Jake Eaglesham: Lucian Morosan; Rory Beech: Tom Waring; Alex Eastwood; Harry Millar; Josh Smith: James Douglas

Replacements: Andi Petalo; Ben Massey; Tom Chandler (All used)

