



Match Report

London Division 1 (South)



Maidstone FC 25 v Sidcup RFC 17

Played at The Mote, Saturday 6th February, 2016



Maidstone's home form continues to deliver and this victory, over third-placed Sidcup, 25-17, extended the team's unbeaten run to six matches. But with four changes to the side that beat Tottonians, expectations at the outset were muted, especially as skipper, Ben Williams, was on a short sabbatical in Edinburgh.

Concerns were soon put to rest as Maidstone started well and proved, throughout the game, that they posed a greater attacking threat in all areas of the pitch. Indeed, in debuts Josh Smith and Rob Field, they uncovered two more players with the capability to play at this level. But the star performers were man-of-the-match, Jake Eaglesham, in the back row and Tom Waring with a brace of tries, on the left wing.

While these two players caught the eye, it was the overall performance of the team that gave satisfaction. Defence was, once again, of the highest order, while the increasing threat from the centre pairing of Alfie Paea and Craig Webb, made sure Maidstone played on the front foot throughout.

Sidcup's warm up, immediately before the kick off, indicated they intended to start at a high pace but it was Maidstone that made the first impact on the game.

Sloppy defence by the visitors saw the kick off from Maidstone turned into a five-metre scrum on the Sidcup line and while the pick up off the back was held, quick recycling saw Alfie Paea make the corner for the touch-down.

Sidcup reduced the arrears on ten minutes from a penalty on the Maidstone 22, which fly half, Twyford, converted: a second on 25 minutes enabled the visitors to take the lead, 5-6. But this was against the balance of play, as Maidstone should have had a second try in the interim after a good position was given away by a poor kick, when slick handling had established the opportunity.



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The lesson was learned and with the half hour approaching, a break by Webb from the Maidstone 22, deep into Sidcup territory, was then moved to the left from the breakdown, and a long pass by Millar released Tom Waring to score in the corner. Millar's conversion was, once again close, but with the lead re-established, Maidstone's confidence level continued to grow.

A penalty from the restart, for off side, gave Sidcup an easy opportunity to reduce the deficit to one point, but a swift reply by the home side from a catch and drive following a line out in the visitor's 22, gave a more comfortable six point cushion, as flanker Richie Bowen got the touchdown, once again in the left hand corner.

On the stroke of half-time, Sidcup had an opportunity to reduce the deficit from another penalty, given when the Maidstone pack was driven off the ball at a scrum. But Twyford drove the kick past the far post and allowed Maidstone to go the break with a 15-9 advantage.

Maidstone started the second half showing their intent to run the ball and play the game in the Sidcup half. And their endeavour quickly yielded dividends. A scrum ten metres from the Sidcup line allowed an attack to the right but, when this was held, a switch to the left saw another long pass from Millar release Waring, once again, to score in the corner. This time Millar's kick from the touchline was inch-perfect to take the score to 22-9.



Sidcup have not maintained a leading position in this year's league by caving under pressure and their intent to get back in the game was never in doubt. When another kickable penalty opportunity for the visitors, was punted to touch, it signalled their intent to look to win the game. While the ensuing catch and drive was held, the swift move down the line exposed the Maidstone defence and allowed left wing, Cutler, to score in the corner.

Maidstone's scrum now began to creak and with two losses on their own put in, the Sidcup eight began to smell blood. A penalty to the visitors saw the Maidstone lead reduce to 22-17 at the end of the third quarter but the introduction of Charlie Williams to the back row, for extra ballast, had a positive impact while a flurry of yellow cards in the final quarter, had its own impact.

The first yellow card saw Sidcup lock, Dutton, leave the field after deliberately slowing the ball



at a ruck. The ensuing penalty allowed Millar to add to his tally and stretch the Maidstone lead to 25-17. The second saw Alfie Paea carded for a late tackle and then Hugh Cowan, almost immediately after, for a high tackle, leaving Maidstone down to 13 players.

With Paea back on the field, five minutes into injury time and Sidcup attacking the Maidstone line, an interception by Pankhurst took play right back to the Sidcup 22. The visitors recovered the ball and began a counter from this deep position. But an attempted interception by Craig Webb, which would have resulted in a try if the ball had stuck, was judged deliberate and a further yellow card was issued, reducing Maidstone to thirteen players once more, against the fully restored Sidcup ranks.



But the defence held and all Sidcup's efforts came to nought, giving Maidstone another scalp from the higher echelons of the league. In summary, if Maidstone had not transgressed so often, the margin of victory would have been greater but a bonus point win against a promotion contender should allow a degree of satisfaction in its own right.

Maidstone

Andi Petalo; Josh Pankhurst; Jack O'Conaill; Ben Massy; Hugh Cowan; Rob Field; Richie Bowen; Jake Eaglesham; Lucian Morosan; Harry Millar; Tom Waring; Alfie Paea; Craig Webb; Josh Smith; Rory Beech

Replacements: Will Fox; Charlie Williams; Alex Eastwood (all used)

