



Match Report

Shepherd Neame Kent Cup



Maidstone FC 17 v Tonbridge Juddian RFC 26

Played at The Mote, Saturday 17th October, 2015



After reaching the semi-final stage in the county cup competition last season, before disappointingly having to withdraw Maidstone found themselves facing the defending champions and current National 3(SE) league leaders Tonbridge Juddians in this opening round encounter at The Mote.

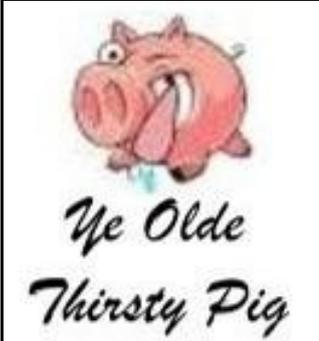
From the outset it was apparent that the reigning champions had no intention of giving up their title easily and had fielded the strongest side available to them on the day, with only 2 of the 19 man squad who had not run out in a competitive league fixture this season. Maidstone fielded a side with several changes and debuts for three players; Lewis Stimpson started on the flank with Josh Pankhurst dropping to the bench as the additional front row cover alongside debutants Andi Petelo and back rower Jake Eaglesham, with DJ Kannemeyer the fourth of the replacements. The half-backs saw Lucian Morosan at scrum-half with Rory Beech moving to the fly-half position, newcomer Alfie Paea in the centres and Jason Smith on the right wing were the only changes from last week's outing at Gosport.

In a match played in tricky damp conditions the home side started brightly enough and kept the visitor on the back foot and largely penned in their own half with some robust carries from skipper Ben Williams, Joel Byford and Man of the match Matt Iles, although their well organised defence managed to hold Maidstone at bay. With the home side largely containing the threat posed by TJs it was approaching the end of the first quarter



that an aberration in the Maidstone defence gifted the first score to the visitors, when a clearance kick from their own 22m was fielded by winger Lee Champion who promptly coasted through the home sides defence as if it was the Red Sea parting to touch down close the posts. Ben Cooper added the extras for a 0-7 advantage that did not really reflect the balance of play.





One name that guarantees excellence.



The home side maintained their composure and continued to press the TJ defence, although whilst Maidstone were able to largely contain the threat from the TJs pack the visitors always looked dangerous with ball in hand with some slick interplay and a back three that showed real pace. Maidstone though stuck to their task and on

the half-hour mark from penalty pushed the ball deep into the visitors 22m; although the lineout did not go as planned, the untidy tap ball from the TJs jumper went nowhere near the scrum half and with Matt Iles at the tail of the line the quickest to react, he was able to pounce on the loose ball for a try 10m in from the right touchline. With the conversion from Millar just drifting wide of the posts Maidstone had reduced the deficit to 5-7.

As the half was drawing to a close Eaglesham joined the fray on the blindside flank for the injured Massey, with Cowan moving into the second row. It is said that the worst times to concede are just before and after half time and it was potentially this period either side of the interval that probably ended Maidstone's challenge as five minutes into injury time at the end of the half and despite being forced back by a robust home defensive effort, TJs were able to put several phases together before creating the overlap wide on the left for winger Will Ward to cross in the corner for the first of his hat trick of tries. With Cooper unable to add the extras the sides turned round with the score at 5-12.



With Pankhurst now on for McKenzie at hooker Maidstone were forced onto the defensive in the opening encounters of the half, and whilst they were able to hold the visitors at bay on the 22m, it was the speed at which the ball was consistently recycled, combined with quick decision making and pace out wide that resulted in Ward's second try as the home defence was breached for a touchdown just to the right of the posts,

Cooper added the extras and TJs looked to be comfortable at 5-19.

Maidstone regrouped and with Petelo on in the front row for Byford began to build some pressure, they were almost over for a score midway through the third quarter when Eaglesham cut through the TJ defence from 5m out only to be pulled back for a forward pass. Maidstone remained on the front foot however after some solid carries by both Williams and Paea close to the posts saw the ball moved wide and with Millar joining the line to create the extra man he was able to



cross 15m in from the right touchline and Maidstone were very much back in the match at 10-19.

The mid-point in the half saw Maidstone having to withstand some concerted pressure on their tryline from the visitors but an excellent defensive effort saw them maintain their discipline to eventually turn the ball over and clear their lines. Perhaps the disappointing aspect was that in some circumstances when Maidstone won back possession they were too eager to kick it away and it was from a lineout in these circumstances that the ball came to ward to cross wide on the left for his third try and with Cooper adding the extras TJs had extended their lead to 10-29.



Going into the last quarter of the match Maidstone had to reshuffle their resources as Iles was replaced by the returning McKenzie with Pankhurst moving into the back row and Kannemeyer on at fly half and Beech moving to centre as Paea left the field. The closing stages of the match were a more ragged as both the damp and heavy conditions took their toll, with the execution by both sides beginning to suffer. In previous matches against good opposition it has been at this point that Maidstone have faded and whilst they were able to maintain possession some of their attacks in midfield seemed to lack the required penetration.



The final five minutes saw skipper Williams replaced by Byford as Maidstone set a lineout deep in the TJ 22m, a variation in the throw saw Pankhurst make the initial drive with Byford then making inroads in front of the posts before the ball was moved wide on the right for Smith to cross in the corner, Millar added the extras for a 17-26 score line. The match drew to a close with no change in the score line but with Maidstone very much on the front foot as Smith continued to make inroads down the right flank.

Whilst a losing result is never the objective, against opposition currently unbeaten and heading the next division up, this was a good gauge of the sides continued development. The forwards continue to progress as both their set piece and loose play becomes more cohesive, whilst enforced changes means the back line continues to be a work in progress but moving in the right direction. From a discipline aspect the penalty count was low and for long periods the defensive effort was effective and held a practically full strength TJs to their lowest score so far this season, even under extreme pressure.

Maidstone: Ben Williams, Josh McKenzie, Joel Byford, Ben Massey, Adam Knight, Hugh Cowan, Lewis Stimpson, Matt Iles, Lucian Morosan, Rory Beech, Jason Smith, Jonno Skelton, Alfie Paea, Tom Waring, Harry Millar. **Replacements (all used):** Andi Petelo, Josh Pankhurst, Jake Eaglesham, DJ Kannemeyer.

