



## Match Report



London Division 1 (South)

Chiswick RFC 20 v Maidstone FC 12

Played at Dukes Meadow, Chiswick, Saturday 19th December, 2015

So much expectation; so much disappointment. After the outstanding display last week, this 20-12 loss to Chiswick was epitomised by the tag 'after the Lord Mayor's show'.

And yet, even with only a part of the ruthlessness in attack they had shown last week, Maidstone could, and should, have won this encounter. But this time the roles were reversed; Chiswick had nothing to lose and played with the freedom that eluded Maidstone on this occasion.

There were some mitigating factors: Ben Williams was absent on family duties and the impact on the front row specifically and the power of the scrum generally, before considering his contribution in the loose, was critical. From the first scrum, the Maidstone pack went backwards in just about every encounter, making Jake Johnson's mopping up job at the back a full time job.

In addition, with both Tom Waring and Lucian Morosan absent, the back line lost its flexibility. But despite all this, it was the poor decision making and the lack of clinical finishing that ultimately decided this encounter.

With Maidstone kicking off into the wind, the early exchanges were evenly matched but the visitors had the first chance of the afternoon. A break by Andi Petalo should have led to a Maidstone score but the finishing touch eluded the back line and while Chiswick gave away a penalty near their own line, giving Maidstone further options, the decision to kick to touch was frustrated by the loss of the resulting line out.

When Chiswick had their first real opportunity, on the other hand, they turned it into points. With fifteen minutes on the clock, a scrum on the right hand side of the pitch gave fly half, Hallett, the time to cross kick to find full back, Grindle, on the left wing. The ball fell awkwardly for the Maidstone defence and Chiswick took full advantage.

Throughout the first quarter, Maidstone were under continuous pressure in the tight but on 25 minutes, with the scrum in retreat, Chiswick incurred a penalty for offside allowing Millar to set up a lineout, deep in the home 22. From the resultant lineout, Ben Massey got the touchdown to level the scores. With Harry Millar on target from half way out, Maidstone edged their noses in front.

But lack of precision led to the lead changing hands once more just before the interval. A line out in the 22 was overthrown and while defensive cover was provided, a penalty to Chiswick was converted to restore their lead, albeit by the narrowest of margins.

There was still time for Maidstone to counter and, once again, this should have yielded points. A quick tap penalty saw Pitkin lead the attack deep into the Chiswick half, while a second penalty saw Maidstone gain a line out on the Chiswick five metre line. But while the line out was won, the drive was not conclusive and the home defence was sufficiently strong to resist Maidstone's attack.

An early second half attacking position for Maidstone came to naught as another line



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out, deep in the Chiswick 22 was over thrown and with Maidstone trying to use the wind to their advantage, a lot of attacking ball was kicked away, allowing an increasingly confident home side to attack the open spaces in front of them.

But after a better spell by Maidstone, playing through the forwards, with Jack O’Connail prominent, Maidstone regained the lead at the end of the third quarter. A break by Craig Webb down the left touchline almost put Lewis Stimpson over the line. From the subsequent line out in the Chiswick 22, the drive by the Maidstone forwards saw Andi Petalo get the touch down in the left corner to restore the Maidstone lead once more, 12-8.

Could Maidstone manage the last quarter of play to eke out a win? Ultimately, the answer was no, particularly as every scrum seemed to be an attacking option for Chiswick as the Maidstone eight continued to struggle. Indeed, the recovery work by Jake Johnson in this period deserved an award of its own, so heroic were his efforts.

But as the game approached its end and errors crept into the play of both sides, Chiswick ultimately made Maidstone pay. A penalty on half way was punted to the Maidstone 22 and the resulting catch and drive led to the ball being fed to left wing, Sullivan, who scored by the posts. With the conversion a formality, Chiswick gained a three point lead.

Maidstone tried their hardest to overcome the deficit but, with too little thought and too much enthusiasm, the outcome was the opposite of that required. The one clear opportunity, deep into injury time, a penalty on the half way line, was reversed when Maidstone tried to prise the ball from the opposition too vigorously, and Chiswick were able to see out time in relative comfort.

The lesson from this loss is clear; on their day, most sides in this league are capable of winning and this was Chiswick’s day. On the other hand, at very few points did Maidstone look the better side and certainly much diminished compared to the previous week.

Consistency remains the ‘holy grail’ and on this form, the journey to achieve it continues. With a number of injured players and absentees this week, due to return when the season recommences in the New Year, improvement on today’s showing should materialise but more work will be needed.

**Maidstone**

Andi Petalo; Josh Pankhurst; Jack O’Connail: Ben Massy; Adam Knight: Jake Johnson; Lewis Stimpson; Hugh Cowan: Ben Pitkin; Harry Millar: Jordan Ring; Alfie Paea; Craig Webb; Alex Eastwood: Rory Beech

Replacements: Nick Bunyan; Charlie Williams; Ollie Newton (all used)

