

Match Report

Shepherd Neame Kent Plate



Quarter Final

Maidstone FC 53 v Dartfordians RFC 12

Played at Bourne Rd, Saturday 12th March 2016

Despite a heavy downpour seeing Dartfordians main pitch being deemed unplayable this Kent Plate quarter-final was played under blue skies on a beautiful spring day on one of the hosts smaller pitches. Whilst at the final whistle the scoreline showed a hefty winning margin, this was no routine victory as Dartfordians provided stern opposition for 75% of the match until Maidstone's superior power and fitness took its toll

With the hosts holding a creditable third place in their first season back in London 2(SE), Maidstone had paid them full respect in fielding as strong a side as possible with regard to their current injuries and unavailabilities. Having started on the bench in last week's league fixture, skipper Ben Williams was restored to the starting front row, alongside Jack O'Connell and Will Massey, in the second row Adam Knight stepped into the berth alongside Hugh Cowan, whilst Jake Johnson moved to the blindside flank in a back row that saw the pacey Richie Bowen taking the openside berth.

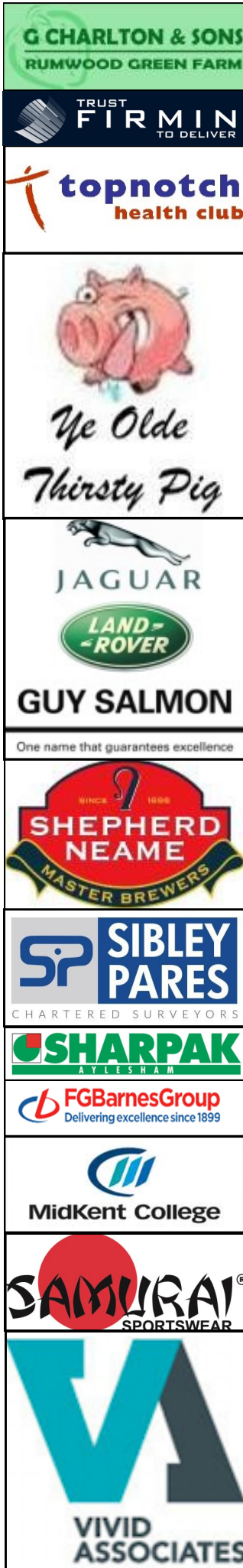
The back division also saw a couple of changes, with Alex Clark making his first appearance since November on the left wing whilst James Douglas retained the full back berth in the absence of Rory Beech. The bench saw Josh Pankhurst joining Andi Petelo as the front row replacements with Ollie Newton and Tom Waring providing the cover in the backline.

The visitors started brightly and it only took 2 minutes for Maidstone to assert their authority with No8 Jake Eaglesham scoring in the corner following some slick handling from lock Adam Knight. Millar added the extras and Maidstone had an early 7 point lead. Whilst Maidstone had the edge in the territorial battle the game ebbed and flowed around the half way line for much of the first quarter, hooker Will Massey made some ground around the fringes of the breakdown but Maidstone's main ball carriers were guilty of lining up too wide and the ball not reaching them.

On the half hour Maidstone were penalised for holding on at the ruck and Dartfordians took the option to kick for the corner, from the resultant line-out the catch and drive saw Dartfordians' Kernott get the touchdown to reduce the visitors lead to 5-7. With this boost to their confidence the home side started to press a strong Maidstone defence and when they ran back a kicked Maidstone clearance the resultant ruck saw the ball moved wide to Peryer who was able to draw the last defender before feeding Edwards to score under the posts, and the resultant Tuley conversion saw the hosts into a 12-7 lead, although this was the last time they were to trouble the scorer.

The closing stages of the first half saw Maidstone in the ascendancy as they pressured the home tryline with last act of the half seeing fly half Harry Millar who joining a rolling maul to touchdown and then convert his own try as Maidstone took a 14-12 lead into the interval.





The interval saw Olly Newton introduced in the centres for the injured Alex Eastwood and the partnership with Craig Webb blossomed as the game progressed.

Dartfordians remained competitive in the early stages of the half, and when Eaglesham was shown a yellow card for an adjudged high tackle the home support felt they were in with a chance of pulling themselves back into the match. However, it was Maidstone that were galvanised by the man deficit and a 40m Millar penalty extended the lead to 12-17. Despite the one man disadvantage Maidstone continued to press and from a lineout at the Dartfordian 22m saw quick ball to scrum-half Lucian Miro-san who demonstrated some quick feet to pierce the home defence and feed Webb to score to the left of the posts; with Millar adding the extras to extend the lead to 12-24.

With the lead increasing coach Hathaway made more changes with O'Connell and Massey being replaced by Pelato and Pankhurst in the front row.

Flanker Bowen was making ground attacking nearer the breakdown and showing great pace and getting in behind the Dartfordian defence and it was from one of these breaks the ball was spun wide with Johnson and winger Tom Waring combining for Johnson to cross in the corner and further extend the lead

Maidstone continued to turn the screw, putting together some good attacking rugby, the lineout which had functioned well all day reaped the next score with Bowen at the back of another well worked catch and drive; and with Millar adding the conversion the lead extended to 12-34. With Dartfordians down to 14 after Tuley received a yellow card Maidstone continued to press, with Pankhurst crossing early in the final quarter after the line the ball on the Dartfordian's 22 and out pacing the defence to score under the posts. 41-12. The final quarter of the match saw Maidstone dominate proceedings as their ball carriers were able to breach the gain line and quick ball saw the home defence stretched and Dartfordians defence tiring, Eaglesham crossed for his second score wide on the right following some good support play.

The last act was left to flanker Bowen as he completed his Man of the Match performance outpacing the defence scoring under the posts, with Millar adding the extra points for a final score of 12-53

In summary, Maidstone were made to work hard for this victory, Dartfordians were competitive until the end of the third quarter when the pace and power of the Maidstone ball carriers started making inroads as Dartfordians tired.

Maidstone return to league action next week when the host Brighton as the two sides compete for a top 5 finish in the table.

Maidstone: Williams, Massey, O'Connell, Knight, Cowan, Johnson, Bowen, Eaglesham, Morosan, Millar, Clark, Webb, Eastwood, Smith, Douglas
Replacements: Petelo, Pankhurst, Newton, Waring (all used).

