



Match Report



London Division 1 (South)

Dover RFC 7 v Maidstone FC 12

Played at The Crabble, Dover, Saturday 13th February, 2016

After heavy rain on the morning of the match, the start of this game was in doubt until the kick-off. The hard work of the Dover groundstaff, who forked the pitch continuously before the game, eventually won the confidence of the referee and the game kicked off at the appointed time.

While the under-surface was reasonable firm, the top layer remained very wet and the prospect of flowing rugby was very low indeed. Maidstone's hard won 7-12 victory was based on possession and territorial dominance and to quote skipper, Ben Williams, 'would have been accepted at the start of play'.

Dover, with a big pack and a good record on their own ground, looked ideally set up to cause Maidstone a surprise. But the new found confidence and cohesion, formed off the back of a recent run of form, eventually proved too much for the home side, although the final score by Maidstone came with only minutes left on the clock.

With Josh Pankhurst confined to his sickbed, Andi Petalo stepped into the hooking birth, while Alex Eastwood took the place of the unavailable Craig Webb in the centre. James Douglas, now returned from his antipodean adventures, secured a place on the bench.

The pattern of the game was established from the off. In both attack and defence, Maidstone had the upper hand and while Dover had the early possession, Maidstone's tackling and good defensive work, meant that most of the game was being played in the Dover half.

Just on the quarter hour, a break by Alfie Paea on half way, set up a good opportunity for Tom Waring on the left wing but a fierce covering tackle prevented the try. But with pressure mounting, Maidstone pierced the Dover defence shortly thereafter.

With the pack knocking on the door with a series of scrums on the Dover 5-metre line, a well-timed short pass to Paea, by Harry Millar, proved enough for the centre to cross the try line by the posts. And with a simple conversion, Maidstone went into a seven point lead.

The conditions increasingly dominated the style of play, with the forwards battling it out upfront, while the fly halves made ground from judicious kicks into open space. With the exception of a Rory Beech run through the centre, evading a number of Dover tacklers in the process, the ball proved too greasy to be handled with confidence and stopped most of the back line play.

As the half came to an end, the big Dover pack began to gain some dominance in





the tight scrums but Maidstone were more than a match in the loose and looked more likely of the two sides to add to their points total. An opportunity came to do this on the stroke of half time but Millar's kick sailed wide of the posts, undone by the underfoot conditions from 35 metres.

Maidstone resumed after the break with early pressure on the Dover line. But a lack of concentration allowed the home side to break from their own 22 to score a points levelling try.

The move was started by left wing, Charge, who weaved his way through heavy traffic across the field, past the half way line. Some slick interpassing eventually released fly half, Phillips, to run from the 22 to score half way out and finish off by landing the conversion.

With barely ten minutes on the clock, plenty of time remained for either side to put their stamp on the game. But with Maidstone dominant in the loose and the game being played predominantly in the Dover 22, it was only the conditions and the Dover defence that prevented Maidstone regaining the lead.

The knock-out score eventually came with the forty minute mark approaching on the clock. A turn over on the half way line saw the Maidstone pack drive forward toward the Dover line, with irresistible intensity. Jack O'Connell was the scorer but the credit should be shared by whole of the pack for their interplay and spirit.

While Millar's kick again drifted just wide of the posts, the points cushion was always going to be enough to see Maidstone to a hard fought victory.

The sense of satisfaction throughout the team was palpable after the game. With 75% possession and the same territorial advantage, the score line could be labelled disappointing but this was very much a hard fought victory that extended the team's 2016 winning streak. Alfie Paea, a growing presence in the team, won the man-of-the-match award for his try and general defensive performance but this was very much a day to recognise the team effort, where everyone did their job wholeheartedly.

Maidstone

Ben Williams; Andi Petalo; Jack O'Connell: Ben Massy; Hugh Cowan: Rob Field; Richie Bowen; Jake Eaglesham: Lucian Morosan; Harry Millar: Tom Waring; Alfie Paea; Alex Eastwood; Josh Smith: Rory Beech

Replacements: Will Fox; Jake Johnson; James Douglas

