



Match Report



London Division 1 (South)

Maidstone FC 26 v Gosport & Fareham RFC 15

Played at Gosport Park, Saturday 10th Oct, 2015

Maidstone returned to winning ways on Saturday with a 26-15 victory at Gosport. With the pack dominating in the tight, this could, and should, have been a more comfortable margin. But with the back line only finding their feet in the last quarter, the outcome remained in doubt until the final ten minutes.

The spectator's Man-of-the-Match, was awarded to Ben Massey, reflecting his dominant game in the line out, but, in truth, it could have gone to any of the front five, so dominant were they in the scrums. The Gosport eight went backwards at every engagement, making it difficult for them to launch attacks, while the tally of turnovers in this department grew throughout the game. Even when Hugh Cowan incurred a yellow card mid-way through the first half, the Maidstone pack remained on top.

But while there was satisfaction in the forward display, the back line continues to be a work-in-progress. This was not down to any individual, each performed well enough on the day. But the cohesion of the whole needs to improve significantly to consistently trouble the opposition, as it did last season.

There was only one change to the team from that completed the previous weeks match. With Josh Pankhurst returning, he took up the blind side flanker role, leaving Josh McKenzie in the hooker slot, while Hugh Cowan moved to the second row, with Adam Knight dropping to the bench. The back line retained the same format as last week's conclusion, with Dalton Kannemeyer starting at fly half and Harry Millar moving to the inside centre role for the injured Craig Webb.

Maidstone dominated the early exchanges and looked a far better team than the opposition, but a couple of try-scoring opportunities went begging as the final pass went to ground. They did get on the board after ten minutes though, when Harry Millar confidently converted a penalty from 35 metres, after Gosport went off-side.

The home side began to exert some pressure on Maidstone, on the quarter hour, but surprisingly, always elected to kick for touch to set up a catch and drive, rather the put points on the board through a penalty conversion. With the visitor pack so dominant, however, this tactic was to prove sterile, until late in the afternoon.

It was a Maidstone mistake that allowed Gosport into the game. A simple mark from a loose Gosport kick should have snuffed out a home attack on twenty five minutes. But the ball was spilled and the quick follow up by Gosport allowed centre, Foster, to go over for a try in the corner. With





Foster adding the difficult conversion, Gosport went into a 7-3 lead.

Maidstone continued to dominate and should have reduced or overturned the lead. A piece of poor execution by the three-quarters, saw a forward pass rule out a try, while the forwards, after a catch and drive, marched the Gosport pack back twenty five metres, only for the try to be denied, held up over the line. The final irony came from the last kick of the half, a penalty miss in front of the posts.

Gosport started the second half at pace and while the Maidstone defence looked secure, there was nothing they could do to prevent Foster stretching the home side's lead with a drop goal, after five minutes. Was this going to be an afternoon of frustration and defeat?

The final answer to this question came in the negative but nerves jangles for some time before the answer became clear. A quick riposte saw Harry Millar get back to his normal rhythm by slotting a simple penalty awarded in the Gosport 22, for off side, as the home defence got stretched. But it took the remainder of the third quarter for Maidstone to turn their increasing dominance into points and regain the lead.

With Gosport suffering their own yellow card in this period, Maidstone built pressure on the home defence and Jonno Skelton took the final pass to crash over to the right of the posts, making the Millar conversion a formality.

With Maidstone now playing the game entirely in the Gosport half, it was another mistake that allowed the home side back into the game. An interception by centre, Hui Hui, saw Maidstone scrambling to prevent a try but, from the ensuing line out in the visitor's 22, Gosport won a penalty and, from a second line out, set up a drive for wing forward, Snowden, to cross in the corner and regain the lead.

With ten minutes to play, with a two point deficit to overturn, Maidstone finally came into their own as a team. From the restart, Maidstone gained the initiative from a line out in the Gosport half and three phases of play saw Pankhurst on the end of a pass to score and regain the lead. Millar's conversion gave a five point cushion but two further penalties in the final five minutes sealed this victory, by a comfortable margin.

While this result reversed the losing trend that was emerging, and confirmed some positive points, it is clear that the team, as a whole, remains a work in progress. The pack had a good afternoon in the tight demonstrating a secure line out and a dominant scrum, with the back row looking more dynamic with the addition of Josh Pankhurst. The three-quarters, on the other hand, have yet to find their best combination. A second half rejig in his game seemed to improve matters and if some fundamental errors can be cut out, there is no doubt the available talent will cause problems in attack for most opponents.

Maidstone

Ben Williams; Josh McKenzie; Joel Byford: Ben Massey; Hugh Cowan: Josh Pankhurst; Jake Johnson; Matt Iles: Rory Beech; Dalton Kannemeyer: Lucian Morosan; Harry Millar; Jonno Skelton; Alex Eastwood: Tom Waring

Replacements: Steve Doughty; Adam Knight: Jordan Ring

