



Match Report



London Division 1 (South)

Medway RFC 27 - Maidstone FC 23

Played at Priestfields, Saturday 7 November, 2015

In recent years, the local derbies with Medway have been hard fought affairs, with little between the sides. Like last year, the elements were set to play a big part in the proceedings with a strong wind blowing straight down the pitch. But both sides coped well with this to provide two, very equal halves of rugby, reflected in the scoreboard.

What proved more difficult for the players was the interpretation of the law book by the referee and one game changing decision that both sets of spectators judged harsh, which weighed the outcome in favour of the home side. This occurred at the end of the third quarter, when Maidstone's Alfie Paea, was sent from the field for a robust tackle that was judged dangerous, bringing the Medway player down on his neck.

Even the Medway coaching staff judged it to be no more than a yellow card incident: it was certainly a strong tackle that saw his opponent swung over Paea's body and crashed to the ground but no worse than a number of high tackles, inevitably perpetrated in a full-blooded encounter of this kind.

At the time, Medway were leading, 21-18, but Maidstone were beginning to dominate the open play. While the visitors later regained the lead through a third try, the impact of losing a man, combined with the struggles they had in the scrum, all afternoon, inevitably gave too many penalty options to Medway's kicker, Harvey, and he nailed the coffin shut with five second half conversions.

With a blank Saturday to accommodate the World Cup final giving time for injuries to heal, skipper, Ben Williams, returned to the side. But with Ben Massey and Craig Webb still not fully fit, Adam Knight returned to the second row and Jason Smith stepped into the outside centre role, with Jordan Ring making his first start for the club on the left wing and Charlie Williams at blind-side.

Maidstone played the first half with the wind at their backs and immediately showed some good touches to take play deep into Medway territory. A penalty gave them the opportunity to get the scoreboard moving but rather than take the kick at goal, elected for the kick to touch to set up the catch and drive.

Medway foiled this move and began to show their own potency outside, when they picked up a stray pass and broke upfield to establish play in the Maidstone 22. With the home pack already showing dominance, a scrum on the Maidstone 5-metre line was only held illegally and a penalty try was awarded to Medway to provide a seven point lead with ten minutes on the clock.

Medway continued to dominate the first quarter. Maidstone were twice pushed off their own ball, conceding penalties in the process, and Harvey, at fly half, was demonstrating his all-round skills to pose a number of problems for the Maidstone





defence.

But as the game settled, Maidstone began to pose problems for the home defence to answer. With Harry Millar and Lucian Morosan both using the high kick to good effect, Maidstone's chasing game consistently established the visitors deep in the Medway half. A penalty, just past the end of the quarter got Maidstone on the scoreboard and, within five minutes, a converted try, well taken by Ring after some good lead up work by the three quarters, saw Maidstone take the lead, 10-7, following a fine conversion from the touchline by Millar.

Medway hit back to regain the lead after 35 minutes. Having broken out of their own half with characteristic opportunism, feeding off a Maidstone mistake, Maidstone conceded a scrum deep in their own 22. While they managed to hold the Medway drive, scrum half, Dance, slipped round the blind side to score out wide and establish a two point lead.

But the half finished with Maidstone back in front, 13-12, following another Millar penalty. Was this enough to take them through the second half? Undoubtedly not, but as neither side had established outright superiority and Medway had shown fallibility under the high ball, it was all to play for.

Maidstone were fastest out of the blocks at the restart, taking play into the Medway half with slick forward inter-passing, with Andi Petelo to the fore. A resultant penalty gave Maidstone field position in the Medway 22 and the catch and drive from the line out was rewarded by a Josh Pankhurst try in the left hand corner, extending the lead to 18-12.

Penalties at five minute intervals saw Medway peg back this lead and establish a 21-18 lead, as Harvey, using the wind advantage to the full, confirmed his status as a consistent kicker.

It was at this point, at the end of the third quarter, that Paea was red carded and the balance of the game changed. Maidstone played without a full back but Medway failed to find their way through the visitors defence in the remaining period of the game. Indeed, it was Maidstone that stepped up to the challenge, repeating their catch and drive from the line out, on the half hour, for Pankhurst to score his second try of the afternoon.

But with Maidstone's pack continuing to creak in the tight, further penalty chances for Harvey's boot were inevitable with one on 35 minutes, regaining the lead, and a second on 40 minutes giving the home side a four point cushion. Maidstone's last gamble, running from their own in-goal line in an attempt to score a decisive try, inevitably came to nothing.

Medway have developed into a useful side over the last few seasons, so losing this game was no cause for shame and a losing bonus point was some consolation. But over the full eighty minutes it was Maidstone that played the better rugby, outscoring the home side by three tries to two. Two factors were decisive: Maidstone's inability to hold the opposition eight in the tight, which led to a number of kickable penalties, and the naïve refereeing that failed to penalise a number of glaring errors

at the breakdown, impeding Maidstone's attempts to play quick rugby and the red card decision that denied Maidstone a player at a crucial point in the game.

Maidstone

Ben Williams; Josh Pankhurst; Andi Petelo: Adam Knight; Hugh Cowan: Charlie Williams; James Corbyn; Jake Eaglesham: Lucian Morosan; Rory Beech: Alex Eastwood; Alfie Paea; Jason Smith; Jordan Ring: Harry Millar

Replacements: Nick Bunyan; Jake Johnson; Dalton Kannemeyer

