



Match Report



London Division 1 (South)

Sidcup RFC 38 - Maidstone FC 15

Played at Crescent farm, Sidcup, Saturday 19 September, 2015

Maidstone came up against the first serious test in this league and came away suffering their first defeat for over a year, by 38 -15. Sidcup, on this performance, already look like title contenders, showing the speed and togetherness that eventually undid a brave Maidstone performance.

It was 'Ladies Day' for the hosts and Sidcup turned out in shirts a fetching shade of pink, in honour and support of Cancer Research, but this was very much a manly performance, with the pack ending up dominating in the scrum and line out which, when added to a level of physicality all over the pitch, ultimately found Maidstone wanting. But this was not by any means a walk over. With ten minutes to go, one score separated the sides but the superior fitness of Sidcup saw them score three tries in the last ten minutes.

Maidstone had one change forced from the previous week as a consequence of the calf injury suffered by Joel Byford. Luke Debnam stepped into the starting fifteen and he was joined by James Corben coming in at open side flanker in place of Jack O'Conaill. Lewis Stimpson came in on the bench along with Jason Smith and the attritional nature of the game saw all the bench players needed for injury replacement.

On a beautiful, sunny day with no breeze of note, the conditions were well set for an open game of rugby and both sides did their best to oblige the crowd. The first quarter was spent sparring around the half way line with both fly halves trying to control the game with tactical kicking interspersed with some direct running. In this period, Sidcup looked the more likely to get the scoreboard rolling, so it was slightly against the run of play that Maidstone scored first.

A long kick by Millar deep into the Sidcup half directed the play away from the Maidstone 22 but it was the speedy follow up that saw a quick throw in by the hosts come to nought as Ben Williams regained the ball and fed Millar for a try. The conversion from wide right was unsuccessful.

Buoyed by his drop goal success last week, Millar attempted another but this it sailed wide and it was the cue for Sidcup to strike back, just on the half hour. A break by fly half, Evans, on the half way, was fed through hands for No 8, West, to score the first of his trio for the afternoon, under the posts, making the conversion for full back Hardy a formality and give Sidcup the lead, 7-5.

Maidstone regained the lead just before the break when a high tackle was penalised and Millar slotted the penalty from the ten metre line to round off a half that grew in intensity as both sides tried to impose themselves on the game. But there were worrying signs for Maidstone in a scrum, very much under pressure and conceding ground, and a line out that looked anything but secure.

Sidcup upped their intensity at the start of the second half and a move that flowed right, then left, then back right again saw centre, Evans, get the touch down by the posts and put Sidcup back in front, 14-7, with the simple conversion. This was extended further on the quarter, as a penalty just outside the Maidstone





22, was straightforward for full back Hardy, making up for a miss earlier in the half.

But, for Maidstone, the source of the penalty, an early tackle on his opposite number, saw centre, Webb, sent to the bin for ten minutes and while the team managed to withstand all that Sidcup could throw at them in this period, the extra workload involved told in the end.

Regardless, it was Maidstone that scored next, the result of some intense work by the forwards that drove them to the Sidcup line with skipper and Maidstone man-of-the-match, Williams, getting the touch down by the posts, allowing a simple conversion by Millar. With a two point differential and under ten minutes of play on the clock, dreams of a comeback floated through the conscience.

But this was where the comparative fitness levels of the teams kicked in and the realisation on the part of Sidcup that by simply playing to their superior strength in the pack, they could take the game away from the visitors. Two more tries by No 8, West and a second for centre Evans, all converted by Hardy, added a further twenty one points to the Sidcup total and left the visitors nursing both physical and metaphorical bruises at the end.

This was never going to be an easy game and Sidcup demonstrated the intensity and skill levels that will be required to compete at the top of this league. Added to the fitness differential that emerged as the game reached its conclusion, Maidstone now understand what playing at this level entails. There is plenty of time for improvements as the team play together more but any visions of storming through this league will have to be put on-hold, until those improvements are delivered on the pitch.

Maidstone

Ben Williams; Josh Pankhurst; Luke Debnam; Adam Knight; Gareth Ellis; Jake Johnson; James Corben; Hugh Cowan; Lucian Morosan; Harry Millar; Tom Waring; Jonno Skelton; Craig Webb; Alex Eastwood; Rory Beech

Replacements: Steve Doughty; Lewis Stimpson; Jason Smith (All used)

