



Match Report



London Division 1 (South)

Tottonians RFC 8 v Maidstone FC 21

Played at Water Lane Totton, Saturday 23rd January, 2016

Great heart can be taken from this 21-8 victory, away at Tottonians, in the display of control and maturity by Maidstone. With the same side that finished last week's game, the increasing togetherness was more than enough to extinguish any hopes the Southampton club may have had of completing the double over Maidstone.

The defensive coordination was good throughout, with leaders all over the pitch making sure that any holes made by the Totton attack were swiftly plugged. This effort was led by the back row, with Jake Eaglesham again outstanding. In the tight, Maidstone ball was consistently won by a front five made to work very hard by the Totton pack and only the lineout showed any inconsistency.

The three-quarters looked the livelier of the two lines and made a number of breaks to stretch the home defence and while they couldn't finish off this good work directly, the first two tries resulted from the field position they established. Rory Beech, at full back, was awarded the man-of-the-match accolade for his contribution to this effort, both in defence and attack.

The only change to last week's side was the inclusion of recent recruit, Seb Corby, as scrum half replacement and Hugh Cowan starting on the bench after taking a knock on his knee early in last week's game.

On a heavy and rather narrow pitch, with a slight wind in Maidstone's favour, the start was fast and furious by both sides. Alfie Paea made the first significant break of the afternoon on ten minutes but couldn't find his support but it was only at the end of the first quarter that Maidstone's line was severely threatened.

Following a penalty that took play into Maidstone's 22, Totton moved the ball swiftly down the line and, with the full back overlapping, it took an inventive piece of tackling by Beech to flip him on his back in the act of scoring, to hold him up over the line. It took a further ten minutes before the first score of the afternoon was recorded, when Maidstone showed a much more clinical approach to their opportunity.

A long, clearing kick by Millar followed by a coordinated chase saw Maidstone regain the ball and bring their three-quarters into play, stretching the home defence on the right. Swift recycling saw Josh Pankhurst free to make the line by the posts and Harry Millar made no mistakes with the conversion to give Maidstone a well-deserved, seven point, lead.

Totton upped their game from the restart but Maidstone refused to give ground.





With almost forty minutes on the clock, a penalty to Totton was converted by Clark, to reduce the lead to four points, but Maidstone were to have the final say of the half.

A Totton throw, in their 22, was won by Maidstone at the back of the line out and quickly turned into attack. Pankhurst was on hand, once more, to finish matters off and, with Millar adding the conversion, Maidstone went into the break with a 14-3 cushion.

Totton started the second half with increased vigour and Maidstone had to defend manfully for the first quarter hour. But in contrast to the controlled performance they had demonstrated on their visit to the Mote, Totton made too many mistakes to disturb Maidstone's equilibrium. And with the third quarter ending, Maidstone increased their lead.

A penalty to Maidstone, just in the Totton half, was the basis for setting a line out deep in the Totton 22. The resultant catch and drive was executed perfectly and Ben Massey was on hand to get the touch down in the corner. A superb conversion from the touchline by Harry Millar stretched the lead to 21-3 and the only unanswered question concerned the addition of a fourth-try bonus point.

While a couple of break-out opportunities presented themselves, Maidstone could not establish sufficient field position to deliver the bonus and Totton, to their credit, never gave up trying to breach Maidstone's defence. And with the game deep into added time, they succeeded, with their replacement right wing going over in the corner to give a final 8-21 scoreline.

With the Maidstone side now settled and playing regularly, and with the added benefit of a strong bench, the ability of the team to match most of those in the league, including the leaders, is not in doubt. There is probably still more to come as the team learn to play a more sophisticated, but patient and controlled, style of rugby. While any thoughts of promotion for this season are redundant, with further progress in match management and the core of this side available next season, an expectation to be in the mix for the following year could be contemplated. Time will tell.

Maidstone

Ben Williams; Josh Pankhurst; Jack O'Connail; Ben Massy; Adam Knight; Jake Johnson; Lewis Stimpson; Jake Eaglesham; Lucian Morosan; Harry Millar; Tom Waring; Alfie Paea; Craig Webb; Alex Eastwood; Rory Beech

Replacements: Andi Petalo; Hugh Cowan; Seb Corby (all used)

