

Match Report

Horsham 10 v Maidstone 16

by Trevor Langley

League: London SE 3

Away at Horsham, Saturday 31 March, 2012 Kick Off – 3.00 pm

Maidstone edged this mid-table clash, 16-10, but it was a titanic struggle throughout. With Horsham looking to play an expansive game through their three-quarters and Maidstone dominating up front, the clash of styles led to an intriguing and exciting encounter.



And there was an ebb and flow to the game, with Horsham providing initial dominance but Maidstone finding a way into the game to establish a small early lead. The second half was a reverse of the first, with Maidstone consolidating their position followed by a fight back from Horsham. But the twist in the tail came from two late scores by the visitors, which left the home side extremely disappointed.



The game was played on a hard, wide pitch but with a tricky wind behind Maidstone in the first half. The elements had a surprising impact, as it was difficult to throw looping passes and Horsham's back line spilt the ball on a number of occasions when spreading their game wide. Maidstone, on the other hand, playing a short game through the

forwards, with Debnam, Williams and skipper, Hayden Mitchell, to the fore, were less affected.

With next week's cup encounter in mind, this was a good work out for Maidstone, challenging not only their physical fitness but their mental resilience as well. And, it should be noted, they came through with flying colours.

The value to the side of Ben Williams is becoming increasingly clear. With each game, his contribution has grown and this week he was dominant in the loose





and tight before switching to the back row, covering for Lee Thomson, who took a knock on the arm, to be replaced at half time.

With Maidstone's defence to the fore for the first ten minutes, as they defended an initial onslaught from Horsham, it was slightly

against the run of play when a high tackle was penalised and McNamara slotted a straightforward penalty from 35 metres. But from this point on, Maidstone's forwards began to establish dominance. At every put in, the Horsham scrum went backwards and the line out looked secure, giving the visitors ample supply of ball.

There should have been more scores for Maidstone before the half-time whistle, with Lee Thomson setting up a number of good position with his probing runs but final execution did not match the approach work and a number of chances went begging.



The second half started as the first had finished but this time, replacement, Josh McKenzie, was on hand to take the final pass to go over in the left hand corner. But with Thomson off the field and Williams in the back row, the pack lost some of its dominance and Horsham came back into the game.

In a three minute period around the quarter, Horsham scored two tries to edge in front. Firstly winger, Sam Rice went over in the right hand corner and then



hooker, Sam Grantham-Hill, scored by the posts to finish off a counter-attack that started in their own half. Both conversions were missed and a further opportunity from a penalty, in front of the posts, also went begging five minutes later as Horsham spurned the opportunity to consolidate their lead.

And these misses proved costly as Maidstone, prompted by the wise head of Sean Charlton at scrum half, inched their way back into the game. With three minutes left, a penalty to Maidstone, 40 metres out and against the wind, was deftly converted by McNamara, to inch Maidstone back in front.

The icing on the cake came in added time as Luke Day fly hacked the ball at the back of a Horsham scrum, on their 22, and McNamara was on hand to kick the ball past his opposite number and then catch the bouncing ball, to go over in the corner. There may have been some element of luck about this final score, and Horsham complained bitterly, but from Maidstone's perspective, the turnaround demonstrated the spirit in the side, which will most likely be fully challenged next week in the cup encounter with Somerset side, Wells, a team flying high in their league.



Team

Ben Williams; Sam Bailey; Luke Debnam: Andy Bacon (Nick Bunyan 53 mins); Hayden Mitchell: Damian Grabb; Luke Day; Lee Thomson (Josh McKenzie 40 mins): Sean Charlton; Sam Ellis (Nick Jeary 57 mins): Leo Fedorcio; Neil Graves; Dan Eastwood; Allie Moss: Steve McNamara