



Brachers

law



Match Report

London Division 2 (South East)

Maidstone FC 41 v Tunbridge Wells RFC 12

Played at The Mote, Maidstone

Saturday 9th November, 2013



After a week of heavy rain, this game was switched to The Mote when the putative hosts, Tunbridge Wells, realised their waterlogged pitch was not fit to play. While Maidstone were happy to oblige, the elements did their best to replicate the expected conditions on the Sussex border and the first quarter of the game was played in a heavy downpour, leaving the pitch swamp-like.



And out of this primeval soup emerged two of Maidstone's players from the past, when losing was the norm. Nick East stepped up from captaining the Mustangs to fill in for Josh Pankhurst at open-side flanker, while Sam McPherson, a filled out version of the callow youth who first played scrum half, five or so seasons ago, stepped in for Adrian Hogben. Once again, the strength of this year's squad was amply demonstrated as they both put in eye-catching performances. Perhaps the incentive was to play in a winning outfit as, for Nick East, this was his first win in over thirty games for the first team.



The final scoreline of 41-12 slightly flattered the home side, as Tunbridge Wells showed themselves to have a potent back line, ably marshalled by fly half, Luke Giles, and a hard working pack. But once Maidstone realised that neat, fancy football would not get them far in the prevailing conditions and asked their forwards to take on the primary role of gaining the hard yards, the inevitability of another win became clear.

The early exchanges were neutralised by good defence from both sides until a long clearance from near the visitor's line was fielded by Mark Dorman on the right hand touchline, near half way. His strong return saw his fellow winger, Sam Brill pulled down by the try line for the ball to be recycled with James Iles, standing in for late illness victim, Ben Brill, in the second row, getting the eventual touchdown.

After the barren first quarter, points began to match the rain, as, from the re-start, Tunbridge Wells put together a series of three-quarter plays that took





them to the Maidstone 22. A smart chip over the defence by fly half, Giles, allowed him to gather as Maidstone were slow to react, and score under the posts, making the conversion a formality.

Maidstone's reply was instant. The forwards, with Jack Davidson to the fore, put pressure on the visitor's loose scrum, gaining turnover ball in the process and, with Lee Evans setting up skipper, Ben Williams, Maidstone regained the lead, 10-7.

A snatched drop goal attempt was the Wells' instant reply to continue the tit-for-tat scoring but, with Maidstone's pack beginning to gain superiority, the action moved more consistently to the visitor's half of the field. With half time approaching, a brace of tries set up both a point's cushion and the important bonus point for the home side.

The first came from returning international, Josh Jensen, who slipped through a gap to reach the line after some good defence had thwarted a number of direct assaults and the second from Sam Bailey, charging down a Giles clearance in the visitor's 22, to follow up for the score. With Van de Westerlo adding both conversions from in front of the posts, the half time score of 22-7 turned on its head the early equality of the teams.



The start to the second half saw the best run of the match, when, Dorman collected a long relieving kick in his own half and, after a quick exchange with full back, Jensen, carved his way through most of the opposition before passing to Van de Westerlo who shipped the ball on to Neil Graves to finish the good work by scoring in the corner. With an excellent conversion taking the score to 29-7, the game was virtually wrapped up, with only one minute on the clock, after this virtuoso run by the Maidstone right wing.



While the rain eased for the second half of the match, the pitch conditions continued to deteriorate and the game became more attritional. Maidstone used replacement, Bunyan, to make the hard yards but the Wells defence stood up well to these efforts. But as the half hour approached, a couple of catch and drive attempts by Maidstone, stretched the visitor's defence and Van de Westerlo got the touchdown after a chip through, adding the conversion for good measure.

But Tunbridge Wells refused to go quietly. A poor relieving kick by Maidstone saw a strong return by centre, Allman, and from a resulting line out in the Maidstone 22, winger, Crees, slipped round the scrum to score.

The final word went to the home side, however, when Man of the Match, Willie Brown finished off some good approach play by Bunyan, to take the score to 41-12 and put the game to bed, with only injury time to play.

With two changes in the scrum and at the pivotal scrum half position for this match, this could have been the prelude to a banana-skin game. But the increasing maturity of the Maidstone side saw them integrate the new faces, with barely a seconds thought, and alter their game to accommodate the conditions, as well. With further challenges to come,



this increasing flexibility, enabling them to confront and overcome both different styles of play and the elements, bodes well.

Maidstone

Ben Williams; Sam Bailey; Ollie Smith: James Iles; Lee Evans: Jack Davidson; Nick East; Matt Iles: Sam McPherson; Caleb Van de Westerlo: Sam Brill; Willie Brown; Neil Graves; Mark Dorman: Josh Jensen

Replacements (All used): Nick Bunyan; James Leverington; Alex Sturzu

