



# Brachers

law



## Match Report



London Division 2 (South East)

Charlton Park RFC 22 v Maidstone FC 15

Played at Kidbrooke, Saturday 11th January, 2014

This 22-15 loss to league leaders, Charlton Park, has probably consigned Maidstone's automatic promotion ambitions to the rubbish bin, for a further season. But, in all honesty, this loss to a side that played better, on the day, in a pulsating and fluctuating match, where the lead changed hands three times, was understandable: it was those to Medway and Sevenoaks, which exposed Maidstone's flabby, on-field, game management that are harder to accept.



There were, certainly, no mysteries as to how Charlton Park were going to play this game. Their style was fully set out in the fixture at the Mote, earlier in the season, when Maidstone came away with a commanding win, and confirmed in last week's fixture, viewed by coach, Andy Foley. But this time, they denied Maidstone the ball for long periods of the match, especially in the second half: and they performed the basics in the scrum much better than the visitors.



In any analysis of this game, it is easy to get lost in the detail of missed tackles and dropped passes but, although such vital errors happened, it was the missed opportunities to put easy points on the board from penalties, in an opening, dominant period for Maidstone that ultimately determined the cause of this vital loss. It is a truism trotted out in sporting jour-

nalism that good teams win games when not playing well. Maidstone have not yet found this knack and until they do, more defeats of this kind are likely.

Charlton Park established the foundation of this victory by playing through their forwards, making the hard yards on a heavy, but surprisingly, well-grassed pitch after all the recent rain. Maidstone, by contrast, looked to move the ball wide, as early as possible. But with underfoot conditions favouring the direct approach, the inability to match the home side's powerful runs, gave Maidstone insufficient opportunity from which to launch their attack.

Maidstone fielded a full side for this encounter. Only recent recruit, Gareth Ellis, who made his debut in the second row





after joining the club after moving back from Holland, could have been considered an unknown quantity. But the opening encounters saw full back, Jensen, take a heavy knock, which could explain his subdued performance thereafter and Sam Brill leaving the field, within the first quarter, after tweaking a hamstring.

Maidstone kicked off against a light wind and up the slope and, for fifteen minutes, dominated the play. In this period, Charlton Park barely moved into the Maidstone half but their defence was strong. However, they did give away penalties in their own half,

but rather than convert these into points, Maidstone chose to run the ball. This profligate approach ultimately came back to haunt them and, while it would be foolish to assume Charlton Park would not have got back into the game, a points cushion at this stage, would have given the initiative to the visitors.

After all this early pressure from Maidstone, with their first serious foray into the visitors' half, Charlton Park got on the scoreboard, on eighteen minutes, with a try. The lead up to the score saw Maidstone concede the ball on their own scrum and from a subsequent Park scrum, a break by No8, Saunderson, was just held on the line, but the ball was released for openside flanker, Baker, to fall on the loose ball to score.



Maidstone responded well to this setback but the early pattern of play continued. Maidstone continued to struggle in the scrum and Danny Baker was brought on in the front row to help provide a counter. Containing the position seemed to be the limits of Maidstone's ambition for much of the remainder of the half, and this they managed going into added time. But a good break by Ben Williams in centre field, allied to good linking play by Morosan, released Willie Brown to score in the left corner, to level the scores. A solid conversion by Caleb Van de Westerloo then pushed Maidstone's noses in front at half time.



Maidstone built on this lead within five minutes of the restart. A push in the line out by Charlton Park, in their own 22, was rightly penalised and Van de Westerloo added the points from the 15m line to establish a 10-5 lead. But a yellow card for Morosan, for not releasing after a tackle, saw the initiative swing back to Park and they took full advantage by scoring in the right corner, winger Bridges coasting in on the overlap to level the scores.

With Morosan back on, Maidstone continued to struggle to contain the powerful Park forwards. But it was a straightforward back line move that delivered the lead back to the hosts. Left wing Rabye got the touch down, this time, but it was the subsequent containment of the Maidstone game plan, by denying them the ball that ultimately proved decisive.

With forty minutes elapsed, Charlton Park's forward pressure eventually told, and the forwards combined to score under the posts, for an easy Norman conversion, to extend the lead to 22-10. Maidstone came back hard after this vital blow and spent the last few minutes of injury time battering the Park line. Ollie Smith got the reward of a try and a bonus point for the visitors, but it was all too little, too late to alter the outcome.

Undoubtedly, this was a crushing blow to Maidstone's ambitions, but the lessons to be learned, especially matching the opposition in the





tight and taking easy penalty points when offered, are clear.

### **Maidstone**

Ben Williams; Sam Bailey Ollie Smith: Gareth Ellis Ben Brill; Josh Pankhurst; Jack Davidson; Matt Iles: Lucien Morosan ; Caleb Van de Westerlo: Sam Brill; Willie Brown; Neil Graves; Mark Dorman: Josh Jensen

Replacements: Danny Baker; Nick Bunyan; Sam McPherson

