



Brachers

law



Match Report



London Division 2 (South East)

Medway RFC 19 v Maidstone FC 12

Played at Priestfields, Medway Saturday 14th December, 2013

The clear aim was to go into the Xmas break with a 5 point win to stay top of the table but the pre-match bar room banter, Medway's performances of late and the Medway Chairman's programme notes, gave a clear indication that this was never going to be a regulation win ...and so it proved.



When Maidstone are allowed to play their way and on their terms, there is no-one better at this level. However, when things do not go as planned and they are unable to execute their game plan, questions are posed and on this occasion they ended up being beaten by a side, who seemingly adjusted better to the conditions and critically, the referee. With a hugely disproportionate penalty count, two concurrent yellow cards at a pivotal point in the game and starved of quality possession, it is a wonder that Maidstone only lost by 7 points and yet they always looked dangerous in the opposition 22 and could have still nicked it at the end.

Maidstone effectively engineered their own downfall and whilst some may question the nature and number of the penalties awarded against them as a key factor in their performance and the result, the reality is Medway performed better on the day.



With forwards Sam Bailey, Lee Evans and Ben Brill out through injury, Josh Pankhurst, moved to hooker, Nick Bunyan, last week's man of the match and James Iles got deserved starts at lock with Jamie Sims stepping up at open side flanker. In the backs, there was a welcome return for Mark Dorman.

Medway, playing with a strong following wind and with their 'sparky' half-back combination dominated the early exchanges in terms of possession and got the first score on the board with an infrequently seen drop goal on the 5 minute mark. This was a clear marker in terms of Medway's intention to take points whenever they could against a Maidstone side, who on most occasions have secured bonus points in the first half.

A series of pressing Medway attacks, meant that Maidstone could not get out of their 22 for first 20 minutes of the game, which didn't allow them to settle or build any rhythm to their game. How-





ever, with their first real opportunity to go through their phases, Maidstone showed just how good they can be when they stretched the Medway defence, using a combination of forward power, good lines of running and close quarter passing to allow winger Sam Brill, to touch down in the corner. Van De Westerlo added the touchline conversion to give Maidstone a 7-3 lead.

This should have provided the opportunity for Maidstone to take hold of the game but Medway struck back quickly, following another period of sustained pressure in the Maidstone 22 to breach

the defence out wide and score in the left hand corner. With the conversion added, Medway were back in front, at 10-7 after 30 mins. With increasing penalty infringements by Maidstone and a malfunction of the lineout, any attempts at building a solid platform and attacking options were stifled and if it hadn't been for 2 penalties that hit the wood-work, Medway could have pulled further away. As it was, 2 converted penalties both for infringements at the break-down extended the Medway lead to 16-7 at half-time. Even so, the expectation was that given the advantage of the wind at their backs and an opportunity to gain increased possession, Maidstone would quickly get back into the game.

This confidence was justified, when turn-over ball from the re-start allowed the powerful Maidstone runners to repeatedly hammer at the Medway defence from inside their 22, which eventually capitulated to allow skipper, Ben Williams to dive over and reduce the score-line to 16-12. Using the wind conditions effectively to gain territorial advantage and then wear down the Medway defence through the Maidstone pack should have provided the blue-print for victory but it is very difficult to implement with only 13 players on the pitch. With a penalty count that was reaching epic proportions, 2 Maidstone players were yellow carded within 5 minutes of each other. To their credit and with a Medway side looking to close out the game with their numerical advantage, Maidstone did not concede any points in this period, yet due to having to concentrate all their efforts on defence, they were unable to mount any attacks to claw back the deficit.



With 10 minutes to go Maidstone returned to a full complement but yet another offence for an infringement at the break-down provided Medway with a penalty, which they duly converted. Even with the score now at 19-12, there was still a realistic expectation that Maidstone could win and they started to put together their best rugby of the match. With Medway very much on the ropes and holding on with every sinew, Maidstone nearly scored only to be thwarted by refereeing decisions that did not go their way or unforced errors. In the end, Medway managed to hang-on to a

well-deserved victory and post a 'win double' over Maidstone.

Whilst obviously disappointing, Maidstone are second in the league and still very much in the fight for honours if they can get back to winning ways in the New Year by consistently producing the rugby that they are more than capable of.



Maidstone

Ben Williams; Josh Pankhurst; Ollie Smith: James Iles; Nick Bunyan; Jamie Sims; Jack Davidson; Matt Iles: Sam McPherson; Caleb Van de Westerlo: Sam Brill; Willie Brown; Neil Graves; Mark Dorman: Josh Jensen

Replacements: Sam Weston; Joel Byford; Jason Smith

