



Match Report

D&B 2nd XV 23 vs. Maidstone 3rd XV 38

League: Invicta 3, Match 18

The Drill Field, Deal, Saturday 2nd March. Kick-off 14:30

Maidstone trekked down to the coast to take on Deal and Bettshanger knowing that a solid victory would really keep the pressure on both Medway and Edenbridge above them in the table. The travelling squad had a real sense of quality about it, with skill, pace and power found throughout the entire team.

Maidstone kicked off the match looking to take the game to the home side from the off. With a strong and mobile pack, the game plan was to keep the ball in the forwards, dominate the breakdown, and then spin the ball wide.

From the start Maidstone pushed D&B back into their defensive third. With Nick East, Lewis Fagg and Alex Hadi playing in the back row, there was a massive physical presence at each breakdown, as well as the opportunity to have extra size and strength running in the backline.

Maidstone pushed hard but were unable to find the gaps for the try. Rather frustratingly, although D&B were solid in defence, it was poor handling that really stopped Maidstone opening the scoring. To make matters worse, from a knock-on deep in the D&B 22, the ball was cleared downfield and the covering Maidstone defence was penalised for not releasing the ball. D&B took the three points, and despite all the play being at the opposite end of the pitch, fifteen minutes in and Maidstone were behind, 3-0.

A somewhat shell-shocked Maidstone restarted the match, and again pushed the home team back on the defensive. With the forward power play being led by the experience of Andy Bacon and Martin Maytum, the pack kept Maidstone moving up the field.

Maidstone's play soon started to click and they really began to build multiple phases as well as ask some difficult questions of the home defence. Sam Mann's elusiveness at 9, and Jack Hart's tactical awareness at 10 started to show and gaps began to appear in the D&B backline. Then from a quick recycled ball at a ruck, a couple of quick passes and straightening of running lines created the overlap for Fergus Carty to get the ball in the clear and get Maidstone on the score sheet. An excellent team try and Maidstone now led 3-5.

D&B pushed back and it was their turn to exert some pressure. For the first time in the match they managed to retain possession and keep on the offensive. Getting the ball up to Maidstone's five metre line, the D&B attack was looking to use their size to punch through. However Maidstone's defence stood strong. Unfortunately for Maidstone though conceding another penalty allowed D&B to retake the lead. This really gave D&B the confidence to start to play, and Maidstone were soon on the defensive again. This time a clever kick into the corner found the Maidstone defence off guard and with D&B collecting the ball, they managed to force the ball over the line and take a 13-5 lead into the half time break.

In truth, Maidstone needed half-time. Despite the good play that Maidstone had put together, their biggest problem was that they were only playing as a team in patches. With the chance to re-focus and re-group Maidstone knew they had a job to do in the second half.

With D&B's confidence still high Maidstone needed to settle quickly. Receiving the ball from the restart, Maidstone gave up possession through poor decisions. Unable to force another try though D&B elected to take a well-placed drop goal. With forty minutes left in the match and Maidstone had it all to do, down 16-5.

If it seemed that this match was threatening to get away, then Maidstone's transformation from this point on was then truly remarkable. In fact Maidstone would now barely spend any time in their own half until the last play of the game.

Maidstone's second try of the match was to come from the very next passage of play. Restarting the match, Jack Hart launched the ball into the D&B half. With D&B knocking the ball forward, Maidstone collected and propelled an attack down the blind side. Setting up phase after phase, the ball was moving well through the hands and flowing from one side of the pitch to the other. This eventually led to the ball being fed to Nick Bunyan running into the backline between the two centres to power his way over for the try. Maidstone were back in the game with the score at 16-10.

The following restart was then fielded by Martin Maytum and he then steamed forward and set up Maidstone's next play. With the forwards keeping the ball tight the ball was moved up near the halfway line. The ball was then launched wide with Jack Hart feeding Alex Goodhew at inside centre. Following some clever play between Alex Goodhew and David Ruaux, the break was made with Goodhew hitting the gap at pace. Then with three defenders bearing down on him, a sublime inside pass back to David Ruaux allowed the outside centre to run the ball in under the posts from forty metres. With Maidstone taking the lead, they had scored two tries in the space of 5 minutes with D&B not touching the ball.

Maidstone's fourth try was soon to follow. Again the power of the forwards was proving too much for D&B. From a scrum about fifteen metres out, a pick up at number 8 had Maidstone forwards running at D&B's backs. With some quick recycled ball, once again Nick Bunyan was on hand to take the scoring pass and get his second and Maidstone's fourth try of the match. Three tries in ten minutes and D&B were rocked, the score now, 16-24.

To their credit D&B did not give up and did force a third try of their own. Another penalty led to a lineout near the Maidstone 5 metre line. With the ball collected well, D&B pushed hard against the Maidstone defence. This set up a ruck on the Maidstone try line and the wiry little scrum half managed to wriggle his way over the line by the posts. Completely against the run of play, but D&B were now behind by a single point.

Maidstone could have gone back into their shell, but despite the blip, Maidstone stayed focused. With the forwards maintaining a high tempo and physical game, Maidstone's fifth try was a display of forward dominance. Controlling the ball at the breakdown, Maidstone managed to get the ball right up to the try line, with Nick East running the ball in. Maidstone up by 8.

Maidstone had one more score in them. Again the forwards setup the platform for the backs to play, and Sam Mann, who had been in outstanding form all afternoon, fed the ball to Jack Hart who wrong

footed his opposite number and scored by the posts. With the conversion the final score was D&B 23, Maidstone 38.

On the back of the second half performance Maidstone deserved their victory. They produced some scintillating rugby throughout the side that led to some fantastic team tries. The Maidstone pack dominated the scrum punishing D&B time and time again. The link play between backs and forwards found high skill levels, and the squad's fitness meant the game could be played at a high tempo until the final whistle. Maidstone is now in a strong position to finish in the top two this term. With Aylesford, Gravesend and Edenbridge left to play; it will be an intriguing end to the 2012-13 campaign.

This week's MOTM performance is a hard decision with so many players, particularly in the forwards having an outstanding match. But for his leadership on the pitch as well as his superb scrummaging and ability to set up platforms from which to play, the award goes to Martin Maytum.

Squad:

Martin Maytum: Matt Vickers: Mark Thurgood: Andy Bacon: Matt Cooper: Nick East: Lewis Fagg: Alex Hadi: Sam Mann: Jack Hart: Ales Goodhew: David Ruaux: Fergus Carty: Ian Howson: Nick Bunyan: Edd Adams: James Sullivan

Absent captains note - *Many thanks to Dave Ruaux for captaining the side this week and managing to gel a mixed bunch of players to deliver a great 3rd team win against a strong D&B 2nd team. Also managing a try from '40 metres' but then he does write the match reports so that distance may have some artistic licence!*