



Brachers

law



Match Report



London Division 2 (South East)

Maidstone FC 27 v Crowborough RFC 10

Played at The Mote, Saturday 22nd February, 2014

With this being the first game in a month and only the third since the New Year, there were concerns before the match of 'rustiness'. And while this certainly proved the case, for both sides, Maidstone, were better able to shrug off its effects and in the end ran out solid, 27-10, winners, gaining a bonus point with a late try.



A relevant feature of this game was the control that Caleb Van de Westerlo brought from fly half, playing for territory much more than usual, particularly in the first half. On a sticky pitch, with the going soft in the extreme, it made sense to play as much as possible in the visitor's half, which this tactical switch allowed. Indeed, the first quarter was played almost exclusively in Crowborough territory, and Maidstone capitalised with two tries from driving mauls, a tactic which has been missing from the playing lexicon for some time. For his efforts, Caleb garnered the man-of-the-match award.



Maidstone's pack showed a number of changes in the front row. With Ben Williams, nursing a knee injury, this was a week too early for his return but Joel Byford stepped up from the Mustangs to ably deputise. A second change was at hooker. With Sam Bailey unavailable, Josh Pankhurst stepped into the breach, with Ben Brill demonstrating his

all-round abilities by filling in at open side. As well as featuring in the open play, he delivered a master class in catching in the line out, employing soft hands on many occasions to make this part of the action a solid launch pad for Maidstone.

After the frustrations provided by the weather over the last two months, Maidstone, playing in their change strip of green, started as if they meant business. A penalty from the kick off was punted deep into the Crowborough 22 and, from the resultant line out, the ball was fed to Pankhurst, who got the touch down from the drive. The conversion from the 15 metre line by Van de Westerlo, ensured the seven points.

Despite giving away a penalty on the re-start, which Crowborough missed, Maidstone repeated their tactics to score a second try after ten minutes. The kick to the corner was followed by a catch and drive, this time Ollie Smith getting the touch-down near the touch line. Another sure-





footed kick by Van de Westerlo saw the lead stretch to fourteen points, with the visitors barely into their stride.

With Lee Evans and Gareth Ellis providing power from the second row, Maidstone were looking strong in the scrum, wheeling and disrupting Crowborough on a number of occasions. But as evidenced in the equivalent game at Crowborough, they bring dynamism to their game, which began to flourish in the second quarter. In addition, the sapping effect of the pitch began to take its toll and the early zip evaporated from the Maidstone play.

Maidstone nursed their fourteen point lead up to the break and came out for the second half looking to play a faster, more dynamic game. One break by Gareth Ellis from the half way line deserved a score, as did a darting run by Sam Brill on the left wing. Both were denied by good Crowborough defence. In the end, Maidstone had to settle for a penalty, in front of the posts, to extend their lead after ten minutes.

But after this early flourish, it was the visitors that piled on the pressure. With the third quarter reaching its conclusion, right wing, Eyres, finished off a period of Crowborough pressure by scoring under the posts. The simple conversion by stand-off, Yates, reduced the deficit to 17-7 and a penalty, three minutes later, for not releasing after the tackle, allowed Crowborough to reduce the deficit further and to increase their impact on the game.



But Maidstone were not to be denied. Raising their game, a notch or two, through the forwards, with Pankhurst to the fore, the home side fought back and were aided by a red-card decision by the referee, sending off centre, Malifa, for a high tackle that escaped most of the spectators.



Just past the half hour, Jensen finished off a move, from a quick tap penalty, to touch down and with the last play of the game, a scrum on the half way line saw Maidstone's forwards make the initial breach and for swift passing to release Neil Graves to get the touchdown and secure the bonus point.

Maidstone will be glad to get this potential banana skin of a game out of the way and start looking forward to generating the momentum required to finish the season with a bang. While heavy pitches will be with us for a few weeks, the prospects of firmer ground should put a smile on their collective faces, allowing their all-pitch style the chance to flourish once more. In the interim, the more pragmatic approach shown in this game should stand them in good stead.

Maidstone

Joel Byford; Josh Pankhurst; Ollie Smith: Lee Evans; Gareth Ellis: Jack Davidson; Ben Brill; Matt Iles: Sam McPherson; Caleb Van de Westerlo: Lucian Morosan; Willie Brown; Neil Graves; Sam Brill: Josh Jensen

Replacements (All used): Alex Hadi; Michael Majcher; Brad Ford



