



Brachers

law



## Match Report



London Division 2 (South East)

Maidstone FC 41 v Deal & Betteshanger RFC 15

Played at The Mote, Saturday 23rd November, 2013

After last week's high, playing against a team several leagues above them, the question on everyone's lips for a return to the league was how motivated would Maidstone be? By the conclusion, with a routine 41-15 victory in the bag, an unequivocal answer had been served up. And at least one of the scores by the opposition had an element of luck attached to it.



Deal & Betteshanger started this season's league campaign well and, until the last month, were riding high in top spot, having won all their games. While recent weeks have seen a dip in their form, it was right to assume they possessed a game plan that would cause problems.



But once Maidstone gathered themselves together at the end of the first quarter and upped the pace of the game, it was clear there was only going to be one winner. And, with the bonus point try tucked away in the locker at the start of the second half, there were no alarms for the spectators, either.

Deal had the bulk in the pack to match Maidstone and some strong runners, outside, but Maidstone's defence was more than a match for their offence and in Matt Iles and Neil Graves had the attacking spearhead for both elements of the team that ultimately proved irresistible. With prop, Ollie Smith receiving the man-of-the-match award, support was clearly available for them, throughout the side.

With Adrian Hogben still absent, Josh Jensen on international duty and Mark Dorman nursing a hand injury, some rejigging of the back line was required. James Leverington came in at full back, Steve McNamara continued at scrum half and Jason Smith came in on the right wing. With the exception of the opening try by the visitors, there was no perceptible loss of cohesion from these changes with the backs contributing four of the seven tries scored.

Maidstone started the game brightly enough and had the first opportunity to get points on the board, with an early 35





metre penalty, but Van de Westerlo pushed his attempt wide of the posts. Deal took advantage of this generosity when, on the quarter hour, left wing, Armstrong was set free on the blindside of a scrum, on the Maidstone 22, to scamper to the line.

This was, perhaps, the wake-up call that Maidstone required and, from the restart, quickly established themselves in the visitor's 22. A penalty, to touch, with the resultant catch and drive, set up Ben Williams for the levelling score and a Van de Westerlo conversion eased the home side in front, at the conclusion of the first quarter.

Maidstone still lacked a degree of cohesion but, as the half-time whistle approached, this was remedied as waves of runners piled on the pressure with No 8, Matt Iles, getting the scoring pass to extend the lead. This was reinforced in the last play of the half, with James Leverington joining the line from full back, to show a clever feint and score in the corner to give Maidstone a 17-5 cushion.



The second half started in the same vein and, from gathering the restart, Maidstone piled straight into the visitors and three minutes later released Sam Brill to score under the posts. This was classic, fifteen man rugby of the highest order.

With a simple Van de Westerlo conversion stretching the lead to 24-5 and the bonus point in the bag, this allowed Maidstone to relax and play more adventurous rugby. While the scores duly emerged, there was an element of too much freedom, at times, and some of the structure in their play evaporated, isolating the ball carrier and presenting turnover opportunities.



With a minor tweak, this was corrected and Jason Smith was the beneficiary, when he popped up on the left wing, to take the final pass, to score out wide, on the quarter hour. With Deal's only effective opportunities coming through their set scrum, they only became a challenging force in the Maidstone 22. A period of pressure from this source, with some last ditch defence from Maidstone, saw a yellow card issued to Josh Pankhurst followed by a balancing card to Deal scrum half, Erskine, shortly thereafter.

With this storm over, Maidstone got back to moving the ball wide and James Leverington was again the recipient of the final pass, after a Sam Brill run, to extend the lead to 34-5.

Deal returned to the Maidstone 22 and with No 8, Hinkins to the fore, turned five minutes of pressure on the Maidstone line into a second try of the afternoon from a 5-metre scrum.

With the light fading fast, Maidstone found one last opportunity to run the ball at a tiring, Deal defence. A quick throw in by Sam Brill to James Leverington on half way, saw Matt Iles receive the final pass, in sufficient space, to cruise over the line by the posts, allowing a simple conversion.

With ten minutes of added time approaching, the final play saw a Deal





attack from the base of a scrum in the Maidstone 22 which allowed them to cross in the left corner, although with more than a hint of accidental offside. Perhaps it was the fading light that influenced this decision?

In summary, Maidstone won this game at a canter. Before the match started, they demonstrated the strength in depth now in the squad and once the initial storm from the visitors had foundered on the usual stout defence, showed the force of their all-round, attacking game.

With a clear gap opening at the top of the league, with only Charlton Park their effective challengers, Maidstone are approaching that part of the season where the spoils will be decided. While there is some way still to go, it will take a significant change in circumstance for Maidstone's ambitions to be derailed, if they continue to play like this.

### **Maidstone:**

Ben Williams; Sam Bailey; Ollie Smith; Nick Bunyan; Ben Brill; Jack Davidson; Josh Pankhurst; Matt Iles; Steve McNamara; Caleb Van de Westerlo; Sam Brill; Willie Brown; Neil Graves; Jason Smith; James Leverington.

Replacements: James Iles; Jamie Sims, Sam McPherson (All Used)

