



Brachers

law



## Match Report



London Division 2 (South East)

Sevenoaks RFC 23 v Maidstone FC 22

Played at Knole Paddock, Saturday 30th November, 2013

**A**fter last week's decisive win, Maidstone entered this game against local rivals, Sevenoaks with significant confidence but two key changes in the side. It was the latter that went some way to explaining the resultant one point defeat, 23-21, against a well organised and resilient opposition.



With Neil Graves absent and Matt Iles moved into his position at outside centre, Maidstone's cutting edge outside the scrum was missing. And with Mark Dorman out with a hand injury, no one seemed able to provide the physical force to break the Sevenoaks line and start playing with the opposition defence on the turn.

While the forwards made a valiant attempt to batter the Sevenoaks defence throughout, the cohesion required was missing as the normal leader of the this element of the attack, namely Matt Iles, was playing out of position. Despite this, Maidstone looked the better side and were within a final conversion of winning the game. And while there are usually no prizes for coming second, two bonus points for four tries and being within seven points of the winner, was some consolation in the battle for the league title.

With the return of Lee Evans in the second row, after a period out of the side through injury, and Ben Brill taking over at No 8, there was a degree of optimism that Maidstone would be strong enough to overcome a Sevenoaks unit that has posted an improving set of results over the last few weeks. In the end, Maidstone failed to do quite enough to post another victory and suffered their second defeat of the season.

Sevenoaks started as if they wanted to make an impression on the game





and, following a scrum from the kick off, No 8, Robinson picked up from the base of a wheeling scrum and fed his blind side winger before the ball came back inside to Aspinall to score, out wide, with barely a minute on the clock. This was an early warning to Maidstone, which they heeded.

Concerted play by the whole side took Maidstone straight back down to the Oaks 22 and a swift move down the line released Sam Brill to score in the corner to level the

scores. Instead of consolidating on this reply, Maidstone, playing in fits and starts, allowed a sharper Sevenoaks back into the game.

A penalty on the quarter hour, converted by Bright, saw the home side back in front but on the half hour, Maidstone regained the lead after a catch and drive from a line out, with Sam Bailey getting the touch down. With Van de Westerlo adding the conversion this time, Maidstone moved into a 12-8 lead, which they maintained until half time.



While the lead was handy, it should have been more, with two good try scoring opportunities spurned. With hindsight, this lack of ruthlessness eventually came back to haunt Maidstone.

After a bright start to the second half, with Maidstone playing through the forwards, the hosts cut the deficit to one point after a successful penalty by Bright, just past the ten minute mark. And this was consolidated at the end of the quarter, when a smart move down the left took play deep into the Maidstone



22 before switching back across the field. A break by Pati, in the centre fed second row, Thorpe, to score by the posts. With Bright adding the simple conversion, Sevenoaks took a decisive lead, 18-12.

Once again Maidstone replied from the restart and from a scrum in the Oaks 22, took play right and then back left for Willie Brown to get the touch down, in the corner, to bring the scores back within one point, with fifteen minutes left on

the clock. Maidstone chose the forward route to gain the vital score but, with a resolute defence against them, were continually repulsed.

There were occasions when the ball could have been released to the three quarters, to move the point of the attack wider, but with no one able to break the Sevenoaks defensive line, these forward dominated attacks foundered. A long range penalty effort, from Maidstone's own half, with five minutes remaining, came to nothing when a kick to the corner may have been a better option.

Maidstone's frantic attempts to get a further score ultimately led





to their downfall, when in injury time, a quick throw in, on their own 22, was turned over by Sevenoaks and Robinson crashed over in the corner to extend the home side's lead to six points once more.

With the light fading and the last drop of injury time playing out, Maidstone achieved the break back. A dummy blind side restart saw Maidstone regain the ball and take play down to the Sevenoaks 22 before taking the play back left, where Sam Brill was given sufficient space to go outside the defence to touch down in the corner. With Van de Westerlo's kicking off beam, the conversion attempt was given to Steve McNamara, whose effort had the legs but drifted wide, at the last second.

Maidstone looked the better rugby side but, on the day, Sevenoaks deserved their win because they were better organised and refused to submit, showing what good defence can achieve. The lesson for Maidstone is twofold: being more ruthless with opportunities, when they present themselves, and improvements in game management could have made a vital difference.

If it was hubris that inspired your correspondent to start considering what needed to be done to secure the title in last week's report, then he, like the team, have returned to the 'feet-on-ground' position that should have been the preferred one, all along.

### **Maidstone:**

Ben Williams; Sam Bailey; Ollie Smith: James Iles; Lee Evans: Jack Davidson; Josh Pankhurst; Ben Brill: Sam McPherson; Caleb Van de Westerlo: Sam Brill; Willie Brown; Matt Iles; Steve McNamara: James Leverington

Replacements (All used): Nick Bunyan; Jamie Sims; Jason Smith

