



Match Report



London & SE Division 1 (South)

Cobham RFC 36 - Maidstone FC 28

Played at Fairmile Lane, Cobham, Saturday 7 October September 2017

After last week's dispiriting performance, Maidstone travelled to Cobham with a much-changed side and with little expectation of a win. While the win eluded them, at the last, the manner of the performance was uplifting for the travelling support and promised better days ahead.

Maidstone dominated large parts of this game, securing a small half-time lead, only surrendered this advantage going into added time, at the close. And with better kicking from the tee, the narrow loss could have been avoided, such was the closeness of the game.

With new recruit, Jack Friend, coming into the back row, to allow Ben Knight to move to No 8, to replace the injured Ben Brill, and Rob Field replacing Matt Iles in the second row, the pack had a fresh look to it. The back line, also, was much revamped with Alex Clarke and Elliot Green stepping up to the wings and Rory Beech moving to centre with Matt Moore taking over the full back role. The bright spot was the return of Stuart Doust at fly-half, who reprised his first game at Havant and kept the line moving fluently, throughout.

On an overcast afternoon, with only a light breeze and the threatening rain holding off, the conditions were ideal for open rugby. And both sides played to this script. It was the cohesion of the Maidstone fifteen, and their potency, that diverted from the expected turn of events. What was even more surprising was that this came without the usual dominance in the tight but from a fast start and an improved defence against a fluent Cobham back line.

Maidstone's first opportunity to get on the scoreboard came after two minutes but Stuart Doust's long range penalty attempt, from 45 metres fell just short. Maidstone's quick-fire start generated a try shortly thereafter, though, with Ben Williams getting the touch down after a tap penalty on the Cobham five. The simple conversion was unexpectedly missed and presaged a weakness that was to prove fatal in the end.

Cobham hit back from the restart and a penalty conceded by the visitors allowed Cobham to establish an attacking position in the Maidstone 22. From a line out, the ball was moved left and a chip though by the Cobham fly-half bounced off the Maidstone defence straight into the arms of centre, Tunnacliffe, who touched down under the posts. With the conversion a formality, Cobham got their noses in front, a position they didn't regain until injury time in the second half.

A spell of pressure on the Maidstone line was countered by strong defence, which resulted in a yellow card for Adam Knight. But as Maidstone counterattacked, the Cobham prop, Brown, also received a yellow, for a high tackle, giving the visitors some respite and the opportunity to regain the lead with a Doust penalty.

As the half drew to a close, two more Maidstone scores stretched their lead to 16-7. The first was another Doust penalty and the second was a try after the three quarters swept upfield and the forwards finished the job, with Stimpson getting the touch down

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near the left corner.

With barely time for the restart, Maidstone conceded a try when a clearing kick was charged down by winger, Oldershaw, who followed up to score in the corner and reduce the deficit to four points at the break.

An opportunity to stretch their lead was spurned by the visitors when a penalty attempt just to the left of the posts was sliced but, putting this behind them, Maidstone capitalised on a stray pass in the Cobham backline, with George Perry running from his own 22 to touch down under the posts. With the simple conversion, Maidstone posted a 23-12 lead with ten minutes on the clock.

With their tails up and seeking a further score to kill the game, Maidstone lost possession in the Cobham 22, allowing a long relieving kick to their own half. Failure to deal with the bouncing ball allowed the Cobham chase to regain it and to feed the replacement wing, to score in the corner. And with a fine conversion by centre, Farrelly, Cobham brought the deficit back to four points.

With the momentum back with the home side, Maidstone's defence came under pressure but proved up to the challenge, once more. As the third quarter ended, so Maidstone stretched their lead again. A high tackle by the Cobham wing resulted in a third yellow card of the afternoon, and from the penalty, Maidstone punted to touch. After winning the line out, the ball was moved left and, while the first attempt on the line was held, the ball was quickly recycled and Doust picked out Alex Clarke to score in the corner.

Cobham reduced the lead to six points with a penalty on the half hour. But with Maidstone's confidence high, Josh Pankhurst regained the ball from the restart and was only pulled down metres from the line to prevent the visitors regaining the initiative.

With defending the lead now a priority for Maidstone and fatigue kicking in, Cobham grew in authority as they took advantage of some desperate defending and the inevitable penalties it generated.

With the game entering added time, a punt to the corner from a penalty yielded the field position for an assault on the Maidstone line and No 8, Davis yielded the score in the corner to reduce Cobham's deficit to a single point. The Farrelly conversion turned this to a single point lead.

With eight minutes of time played, a final try for Cobham, after a catch and drive, consolidated their victory margin. Farrelly's fine conversion took away a losing bonus point from the visitors and, such is the perfidy of the game, a comment by the Maidstone skipper was penalised by a red card to compound the disappointment for the team and the travelling support.

But, in summary, a fine, if losing, display with a performance to build on.

Maidstone Ben Williams; Josh Pankhurst; Garry Beck: Adam Knight; Rob Field: Jack Friend; Lewis Stimpson; Ben Knight: Lucian Morosan; Stuart Doust: Alex Clarke; Rory Beech; George Perry; Eliot Green: Matt Moore

Replacements: Ashley Gilligan; Tom Chandler; Josh Smith (All used)

