



## Match Report



### London & SE Division 2 (South East)

Aylesford Bulls RFC 21 v Maidstone FC 19

Played at The Jack Williams Ground, Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2018



On an unfeasibly sunny October afternoon, a large crowd assembled for this local Derby at the Jack Williams ground.

Both sides had made slow starts to the season, with Aylesford yet to record a win – except in their Kent Cup victory over Maidstone at the Mote on the First Day of the season.

Maidstone's line up was missing a few familiar faces but it was exciting to see Dan Fisher starting a 1<sup>st</sup> Team match for the first time, taking the No7 shirt in a back-row that saw Charlie Bentley at 8 and Jamie Marzetti at No 6.

In pre-match comments, Head Coach Mike Hebden said that the game would be all about effort, on which front the Maidstone team could not be faulted, providing all the endeavour and skill required to win the match but ultimately coming up short in a closing spell of high drama and tension.

Maidstone kicked off into bright sunshine to get the game under way and early skirmishes showed that there would be a good deal of parity between the teams – except in the scrums where Aylesford's pack looked significantly stronger.

A penalty to Aylesford on 9 minutes was duly slotted from in front of the posts which was cancelled out shortly afterwards by a 40 metre penalty from Euan Caborn, again from in front of the posts.

Strong running from Joe Burden and Josh Smith saw another straightforward penalty awarded to Maidstone, kicked by Caborn and then the Maidstone lead was stretched to 9-3 following another successful kick from the Maidstone fly-half.





Despite what was only a slender lead, Maidstone seemed fairly comfortable in attack and defence and probably had the bigger share of possession and territory, with the line-out in particular functioning well. However, shortly before the break, Maidstone were pushed off the ball from a scrum on their own 22 and shortly afterwards conceded a penalty for holding-on,

that was kicked for a 6-9 half-time score.

At half-time, the pack was re-shuffled with Tom Varker switching from prop to hooker for the injured Ryan Murphy and veteran prop Rich Gray replacing Varker at prop, a format that largely nullified the advantage Aylesford had enjoyed in the scrum in the 1<sup>st</sup> Half.

A dangerous break from Aylesford saw their winger tackled into touch by Josh Smith in the right-hand corner, when it seemed that a cut inside would have yielded an easy try. But with that threat contained, Maidstone began a period in which they appeared to be gaining an upper hand, with successive penalties giving them good field position inside the Aylesford 22 and possession from cleanly taken line out.



A rumble and melee from the 2<sup>nd</sup> of these line-outs resulted in a try for Dan Fisher, stretching the Maidstone lead to 14 -6 but Caborn's hitherto unblemished kicking record was tarnished when the far from easy conversion drifted wide.

15 Minutes later, Aylesford added their own unconverted try to the scoresheet after a move that saw their winger go over in the corner, but Maidstone held onto a precious 14-11 lead as the minutes ticked away.

A 40m penalty similar to the one he kicked in the first half offered Caborn a chance to stretch the Maidstone lead by 3 points but it narrowly missed the uprights.

However, he subsequently found a perfect length with a touch kick that took play to within 15 metres of the Aylesford line and Varker was able to charge down the clear-

ance kick as Aylesford tried to clear their lines and in the ensuing period, Maidstone were awarded a penalty on the Aylesford 22 and 5m in from the right-hand touch-line.



Following a long period of treatment to one of the Aylesford pack, it was surprising to see that Maidstone kicked for the corner instead of goal,

although the line-out had functioned well all afternoon and a further 5 or 7 points would have been very welcome – and indeed, 3 points from a kick at goal was by no means certain from so wide out. Crucially, the line-out was given as not straight but Aylesford were by no means out of the woods yet and their supporter's nerves must have been jarred by seeing them desperately trying to retain possession on their own try-line in and around the posts.



From the subsequent clearance kick into the Maidstone half, a knock on by Maidstone gave Aylesford an attacking platform from which they then knocked on themselves 7 or 8 metres out from the Maidstone try-line in the left-hand corner. The otherwise rock-solid Rich Gray lost his footing in the scrum (or so he told me afterwards) and Maidstone were pushed off the ball, which squirted out for the Aylesford 6 to collect and score wide out, skilfully converted by the number 9.

With the Aylesford supporters jubilant at having achieved what was surely the winning score as there were just 5 minutes of injury time left, Maidstone kicked off and managed to turn over Aylesford possession on their 22, from which a powerful run from Centre Joe Burden turned into an unconverted try just inside the corner flag as winger Scott De Zoeten was able stretch out in the tackle to touch down.

Maidstone now boasted a 19-18 lead, with only a minute or two left on the clock.

Aylesford kicked off and Maidstone retrieved and kicked to touch on the half-way line. Aylesford worked play into the Maidstone half and a penalty was then given against Maidstone from 30m in front of the posts, which no one doubted would sail between the uprights to seal victory for an Aylesford side that had once again pulled off a victory in the local derby in a match that could have gone either way.

It was certainly a bitter pill for the Maidstone team and supporters to swallow, when so much had been achieved on the field of play and when victory seemed assured. Let's hope that we see another thriller for the rematch at the Mote in the return fixture, but with a different outcome. 3<sup>rd</sup> time lucky perhaps?

Maidstone: Tom Varker(c); Ryan Murphy; Will Fox; Charlie Williams; Ben Massey; Jamie Marzetti; Dan Fisher; Charlie Bentley; Jack Leech; Euan Caborn; Josh Smith; Shaun Woolford; Joe Burden; Scott de Zoeten; Alex Clark

Replacements: Richard Gray; Dane Smith; Jack Bramwell (all used).

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