

## Match Report

London Division 1 (South)

Maidstone FC 80 v Charlton Park RFC 21

Played at The Mote, Maidstone, Saturday 23rd April, 2016



Maidstone emerged from this end-of-season encounter convincing winners, 80-21. With visitor's, Charlton Park, condemned to relegation and the hosts in mid-table, it was known the outcome would have little impact on final league position for either team.

But credibility is a strong driver: Maidstone to prove the previous week's heavy loss to Guildford was an aberration; the visitors to show the draw they earned at the start of the season was no fluke. In fact, the game illustrated the strengths and weaknesses of both teams. Maidstone looking to run from all over the pitch but failing to execute at crucial points; Charlton Park dominating the scrums but unable to transfer this dominance to other parts of the game.

In his swansong for the club, before returning to New Zealand, Harry Millar, playing at fly half in place of the injured Rory Beech, converted nine of the twelve tries scored by the hosts, showing why he will be missed next year.














The only other forced change in the side, from the previous week, was Alex Clark coming in on the right wing for Alex Eastwood. The rotation of the props and open side wing forward, came under the 'game management' banner, allowing Maidstone a strong bench.

In fact, the game was not as one-sided as the score-line might suggest. While Maidstone dominated the first half completely, the second period was a much more balanced affair, with yellow cards tumbling from the referee's pocket throughout, affecting the tenor of the play.

Like last week, Maidstone spent the first twenty minutes of the second half with a reduced number of players on the pitch. At one point, they were down to thirteen, as







offences in a retreating scrum were penalised. But with experience on the bench, in the form of Ben Massey, being deployed in this period, the listing ship was righted and the last quarter was, once again, dominated by Maidstone's running play.

On a pitch that had dried considerably over the last two weeks, and with an easterly wind reminding everyone that Spring has not yet fully established itself, the conditions for a fast open game of rugby were perfectly set. From the outset, Maidstone looked determined to move the ball and after five minutes scored their first try, with Craig Webb accepting an inside pass from Harry Millar to score under the posts.

The second try saw Tom Waring finish a move, started on half way, in the left corner, to post a 14-0 lead after ten minutes, further extended at the end of the first quarter, when hooker, Will Massey, was on hand to score when a Harry Millar penalty attempt came back off the posts. Millar was more clinical with the touchline conversion than he was with the penalty attempt from a considerably easier position, to extend the lead to 21-0.



With Maidstone making breaks at will, it was only some last ditch defending and over complicated play that prevented more tries being scored. Indeed, at this point, Charlton Park had barely set foot in Maidstone's half.

The bonus point try, came before the half hour, securing Craig Webb's second of the afternoon and the restart saw Maidstone's fifth, by Jake Johnson, following a break by Alfir Paea, in the centre. The last try of the period came from James Douglas, who converted it, as well, with an in-off, to stretch the lead to 40 points.



But the last five minutes of the half saw fortunes change as Charlton Park began to establish field position and make their superiority, in the scrum, tell. A yellow card for Harry Millar, for some injudicious advice to the referee, was the final act of the half, giving the visitors a much-needed boost to their morale.

And they took full advantage. Starting the second half at a high tempo, they scored a try through centre, Collins, after three minutes, converted by fly half, Alex Millar. While Maidstone managed to weather the rest of the period before the return of Harry Millar, Charl-





ton Park had established that working through the scrum, they could exert pressure on Maidstone they couldn't by moving the ball wide.

Inevitably, this led to transgressions by the Maidstone eight as they struggled to contain, and the next yellow card went to Lewis Stimpson, just past the ten minute mark. Jack O'Connell incurred the referee's disapproval, and a yellow of his own, at the next scrum with a penalty try awarded, to rub salt into the wounds, to reduce the deficit to 40-14.



But with Ben Massey bringing some stability in the tight and Andi Petalo adding an extra dimension in the loose, Maidstone hit back. Two, short-range Petalo tries, just before the end of the quarter, bolstered the score to 54-14 and re-established Maidstone in the game.

Another scrum on the Maidstone five-metre line yielded a further penalty try to the visitors, completing an odd brace to the 'others' column. But this was Charlton Park's high water mark. The last quarter was all Maidstone, helped by two yellow cards to the visitors.

A brace of his own to Jake Eaglesham, the hat-trick try for Craig Webb and another for Tom Waring completed the scoring and a balance of forty points in each half gave the game some sort of symmetry.

This win lifted Maidstone to sixth in the table, to complete a very satisfactory first season in London 1 (South). The second half of the campaign demonstrated that the team was competitive with all but the very best and if the bulk of this group of players is available next season, there should be more to come.

**Maidstone** Ben Williams; Will Massey; Jack O'Connell: Adam Knight: Hugh Cowan; Jake Johnson; Lewis Stimpson; Jake Eaglesham: Lucian Morosan; Harry Millar: Tom Waring; Craig Webb; Alfie Paea; Alex Clark: James Douglas  
Replacements: Andi Petalo; Richie Bowen; Ben Massey (All used)

