

Match Report

London Division 1 (South)

Maidstone 34 v Dover 8

Played at The Mote, Saturday 24th October, 2015



With the previous week's Kent Cup encounter having taken its injury toll, added to the inclusion of three new players and the first heavy pitch of the season, this game with Dover posed a significant number of unknowns for Maidstone. But they emerged with a solid, 34-8, win and a number of questions answered.

The concussion suffered by skipper, Ben Williams, last week, meant an enforced period on the side-lines and an immediate opportunity for Andi Petelo to start in the front row. It also gave Josh Pankhurst the opportunity to captain the side, from hooker, moving up from the back row to replace the injured Josh McKenzie. This was another chance grabbed with both hands, securing the Spectator man-of-the-match award for his all-round display.

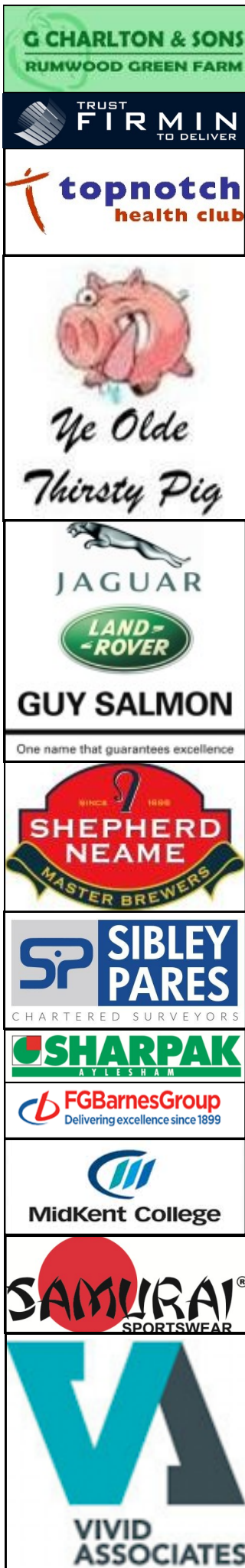
The loss of Ben Massey to a hamstring twinge, allowed Hugh Cowan to start in the second row, with Jake Eaglesham, another recruit, bolstering the back row on the blind side. Despite all these changes, the impact was positive, with the scrum consistently getting the nudge on the Dover eight and the line out a model of security.

The back line saw only one personnel change from last week, with Alex Eastwood returning to the right wing in place of Tom Waring.

Maidstone started the game positively and an early break by Eastwood, down the right, highlighted the positive intent of the side.

A charge down of a Dover clearing kick, shortly thereafter, eluded the Maidstone chase, in goal, but it was the pressure exerted by the Maidstone scrum that led directly to the opening score just before the ten minute mark. With the visitor's scrum going backwards, the resultant penalty on the No 8,





40 metres out, for not releasing allowed Harry Millar the chance to open the scoring.

After a quiet opening, Dover began to make inroads into the Maidstone half. A penalty chance for pulling down in the line out was sent wide by fly half, Charge, before yellow

cards, for a Maidstone high tackle and an over-vigorous response from Dover, reduced both sides to fourteen men.

Maidstone increased their lead on twenty minutes: a quick tap penalty on the Dover 22, by Morosan, was moved quickly to a charging Byford, who fed Eaglesham to dive over half way out, giving Millar a straightforward conversion.

Maidstone's one area of weakness, all afternoon, was the restart and on this occasion they were made to pay. A turnover was moved to the right by the visitor's but a defensive offside on the Maidstone 22, allowed Charge to reduce the deficit with a straightforward penalty conversion.



With Maidstone's pack dominant, a catch and drive down the Dover left was switched across field with No 8, Matt Iles, getting the touch down after a ruck just before the half hour. A few minutes later, but from the half way this time, a replica catch and drive saw the ball moved to Paea on the loop, to set up Eastwood, for the run in, to score by the posts. Millar's conversion extended the lead to 22-3.



A fourth, bonus-point try, just before the half-time whistle, saw a further catch and drive by the pack set up skipper Pankhurst for the touchdown: but it was the finely judged chip from his own half by Millar, turning defence into attack, that set up the position for the pack to finish things off.

With a comfortable 27-3 lead, the expectation for the second half was for Maidstone to build on the solid foundation they had built. But this was to ignore the fight back from the visitors, from the restart, with flanker, McNube, prominent.

A penalty, in the Maidstone half, saw Dover kick to the 22 to set up a catch and drive. Although the first attempt was thwarted, a further penalty was treated in the same way and this time No 8, Plant, got the touch down to reduce the Maidstone lead to 27-8 with just three minutes on the clock.



A further scoring chance was given to Dover, shortly thereafter, but this time Maidstone won the line out on the visitor's throw and snuffed the opportunity. Dover were now looking the livelier side and Maidstone were having to defend, manfully. In his last game for the club, Jonno Skelton was a stand out in this period.



Just as the last quarter of the game began, so Maidstone killed any chance of a Dover revival with a fifth try. Alex Eastwood was the scorer, cruising in to touch down just to the right of the posts, following a good cross field movement by the back line, making Millar's conversion a formality.

But Dover refused to lie down and consistent pressure on the try line saw two Maidstone players receive yellow cards in quick succession, as defence was stretched to the limit. The visitors should have scored at least



one try, when the ball was dropped forward in the act of touching down. But this was Maidstone's opportunity to show their doggedness and ultimately, the thirteen held out to the final whistle.

In summary, this was a solid Maidstone performance. The pack looked comfortable in the tight and line out, continuing the progress shown in their previous matches; the three quarters showed the ability to break the line, a quality that has

been missing of late and the defence is improving. There are still factors to work on, notably the restarts, but the squad of players now available contains sufficient quality to ensure this league holds no fears.

Maidstone

Andi Petelo; Josh Pankhurst; Joel Byford: Adam Knight; Hugh Cowan: Jake Eaglesham; Lewis Stimpson; Matt Iles: Lucian Morosan; Rory Beech: Jason Smith; Alfie Paea; Jonno Skelton; Alex Eastwood: Harry Millar

Replacements: Steve Doughty; James Corbin; Dalton Kannemeyer (all used)

