

Match Report

London Division 1 (South)



Maidstone FC 66 v Gosport & Fareham RFC 0

Played at The Mote, Saturday 27th February, 2016



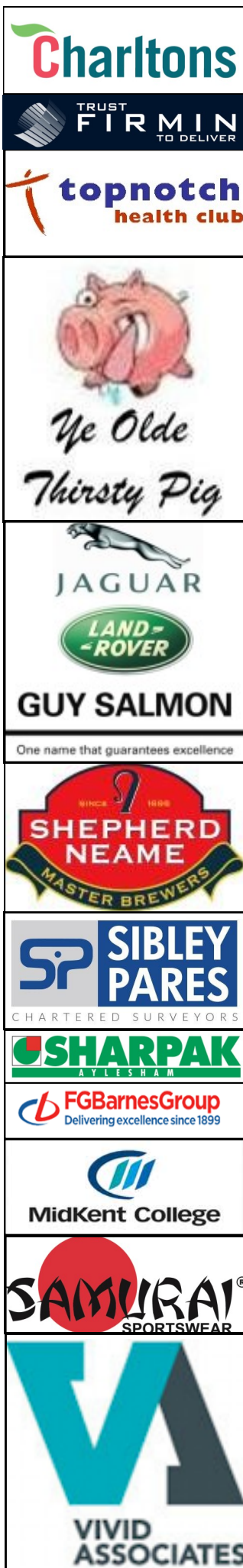
A spate of injuries, some as a result of after last week's encounter with Medway and some from the training ground, plus some unavailability's, due to the fact this game was slotted into a 'blank' weekend, meant that Maidstone's team-sheet had a fresh and slightly unusual look to it. So the margin of victory, by 66-0, came as a surprise to many.

Gosport and Fareham have always provided a robust game, which secured them promotion two seasons ago, when they defeated Maidstone in the play-off game at their home ground. But this was a shadow of that team, reflected in the scoreline and on the pitch. Not that they didn't defend wholeheartedly or have periods of attack, when they stretched Maidstone. Simply, it was just clear that they lacked the quality of player to trouble the home side, on the day.

Will Massey, a recent recruit from Folkestone, stepped up to the hooker position while Jake Johnson returned to the back row in place of the injured Richie Bowen. With Alfie Paea and Rory Beech both picking up injuries, the back line also had a fresh look with Josh Smith coming into the starting team, on the right wing, and James Douglas, starting at full back for the first time, since his return from the Antipodes.

Any doubts as to the capability of this Maidstone team were dispelled within a few minutes of the start. With a strong easterly wind at their backs, Maidstone were on the scoreboard within five minutes, when, at the first scrum on the Gosport 22, the ball emerged from the Gosport back row and Rob Field was the first to react, scooping it up and running to the try line, unopposed. With Harry Millar converting, Maidstone had the best possible start.





Maidstone elected to use the conditions to their advantage, with Harry Millar's left boot gaining huge yardage deep into Gosport territory, at every opportunity. The next score came as a result of this strategy, when Gosport failed to direct their line out throw accurately and, from the resulting scrum, Maidstone moved the ball quickly to Craig Webb in the centre to score by

the posts. With the conversion a formality, Maidstone were 14 points to the good with only seven minutes on the clock.

A spell of Gosport pressure established that Maidstone's defence would be required but after a catch and drive had been repulsed, the home side were on the scoreboard once more. Maidstone this time ran the ball from their own 22 to establish an attacking position in the visitor's half and from a line out, the ball went wide for Alex Eastwood to run round the full back to score in the corner.

While Millar's kick was wide this time, the next, bonus-point, try, just before the 25 minute mark, saw a second score for Rob Field under the posts and a routine conversion, to post as many points as minutes on the clock.



And the scoreboard continued to tick over. From a scrum on the Gosport 5 metre line, Morosan fed right wing, Josh Smith for his first try for the club and with half time approaching, Harry Millar made a scintillating break to feed Craig Webb for his second of the afternoon. With Millar making sure of both conversions, Maidstone's half-time total reached 40 points without reply.



The second half started almost as a replay of the first. But this time, Jack O'Connail dropped the ball over the line from Maidstone's first attack. But it didn't take long for the score to begin rolling once more. And this time, in slightly controversial circumstances.

A Maidstone line out on the Gosport 22 was turned into a catch and drive, which thundered to the line for Rob Field to get his hat-trick try. But the visitors withdrew from the engagement in an attempt to catch Maidstone offside, after firstly attempting to stop it. The referee allowed the score, however, and moved the home side to a 45 point lead.

Olly Newton came off the bench to add some



extra punch to the back line and showcase his skills in making a number of breaks, continually threatening the Gosport line. But with Maidstone over-complicating their play, Gosport had a spell of pressure on the Maidstone line. It took a turnover to put Maidstone back on top, from which the ball was quickly spun to Field, who made good ground before passing inside to full-back, James Douglas to score under the posts, knocking even more wind out of Gosport's sails.



A try for Jake Eaglesham at the end of the third quarter and a third for Craig Webb on the half hour, both converted by Harry Millar, completed the scoring and this 66-0 rout. There should have been more tries for Maidstone in the second half, the most notable on the stroke of full time, when the final pass was dropped, metres from the line. But typical of a side that is so much on top, they looked to over complicate matters, with individuals seeking the break rather than concentrating on simple, fifteen-man rugby, making the ball do the work to find open spaces.

But it would be churlish to look for faults in such a display, when a rejigged team, to some extent having to learn to play together in the early period, posts such a score. With the grounds beginning to regain some firmness under-foot, the opportunities for Maidstone to use their speed will increase in the games to come. If they can combine this speed with increased technical efficiency, some good games will be in prospect.

Maidstone

Andi Petalo; Will Massey; Jack O'Connail: Ben Massey; Hugh Cowan: Rob Field; Jake Johnson; Jake Eaglesham: Lucian Morosan; Harry Millar: Tom Waring; Craig Webb; Alex Eastwood; Josh Smith: James Douglas

Replacements: Will Fox; Adam Knight; Olly Newton (All used)

