

Match Report

London Division 1 (South)

Maidstone FC 36 v Guildford RFC 14

Played at The Mote, Saturday 12th December, 2015



This comprehensive 36 – 14 win by Maidstone marked the final turning point of the transformation of a group of talented players into a team. While Jake Johnson was awarded the man-of-the-match award, for his outstanding back row performance, in truth, this was a team performance of the highest order and any of a number of players could have claimed the prize.














On the attack, Maidstone were swift and clinical, with both centres causing problems. The first try set up by Alfie Paea, was out of the top drawer but there were threats right across the line that translated a high percentage of opportunities into points. And with Harry Millar orchestrating from fly half, Maidstone look consistently dangerous with ball in hand.

In the pack, the back row is now 'up to speed' while the front five are fully competitive against some bigger units. Only in the tight is there a weakness, but this is more than compensated by the combined defence that is finally beginning to strangle the opposition. With some of last season's stars set to return in the New Year, the prospects for the second half of this season are looking good.

There are, of course, some caveats. Guildford have suffered from injuries, so the fifteen that Maidstone faced may not have been their best. Equally, reproducing top form on a weekly basis will be required, particularly against those teams above them in the league, if they are to move up the table. Time will tell.

With the exception of hooker, where Josh Pankhurst returned in place of Josh McKenzie, the Maidstone fifteen was the same as the one that finished the game at Chobham,





with Jordan Ring added to the bench.

Maidstone started the first half playing against the wind and slope and, with the ground muddy, underfoot, a dour forward battle might have been expected. Instead, with less than five minutes on the clock, Alfie Paea made a superb break in the centre and then set up Alex Eastwood with a finely

timed pass for the winger to finish the move in the corner. With Harry Millar slotting a difficult conversion, Maidstone were seven points to the good.

A reply from Guildford was expected and it duly arrived five minutes later. From a penalty on the half way, they set up a line out on the Maidstone 22 and, with a strong catch and drive, put blind side flanker, Kirk, over the line. With a conversion from Fee, the scores were levelled.

Kirk’s next significant contribution to the game was to result in a yellow card, when his over-vigorous attentions to his opposite number, in the line out, were spotted by the referee. But this didn’t stop Guildford mounting pressure on the home try line, mainly through their dominance in the scrum, which saw Maidstone giving ground and conceding penalties. Ultimately, Hugh Cowan caught the eye of the referee and was given a balancing ten minutes in the bin for a technical infringement on the Maidstone line.



Despite their territorial advantage, Guildford failed to convert their pressure into points and it was Maidstone that finished the half strongly, scoring two tries in the last ten minutes. The first came from a loose Guildford clearance, which allowed Rory Beech and Tom Waring space on the left to run at the visitors defence. With Stimpson making the vital break, the move was finished by Beech and, with Millar adding the conversion, Maidstone regained the lead.



The icing on the cake came on the forty minute mark, when a penalty allowed Maidstone to set up a catch and drive, with Ben Massey getting the touch down, and consolidating the Maidstone half time lead at 19-7.

With the slope and wind in Maidstone’s favour, Guildford new they needed to get back into the game early and started the second half with this intent. But after withstanding the early pressure, Maidstone began to stretch their lead and, with the exception of some errors that gave the visitors chances to



play the game in the Maidstone half, never lost control.

The bonus–point, fourth try for Maidstone, came on ten minutes, following another catch and drive from the line out. While the drive was held by Guildford, quick recycling saw Rory Beech on the end of a Harry Millar pass, to score by the posts, making the conversion a formality.



The end of the third quarter saw Paea replaced by Jordan Ring and a fifth try to the home side. A penalty to Maidstone, on their own 22, was tapped and with Guildford disorganised, play swept upfield. A strong burst by Ben Williams was thwarted at the last but the ball was slipped to the supporting Morosan to score in the corner.

An uncharacteristic missed penalty kick to touch allowed Guildford an opportunity to get back into the game on the half hour. While Maidstone defended manfully, it was inevitable that Guildford would ultimately find a breach and full back Jordan found his way over, half way out. With Fee adding the conversion, Maidstone's lead was cut to 31-14.



With forty minutes on the clock, Maidstone scored their sixth try. Once again, it was the inter-passing and support that proved too much for Guildford's defence with Johnson making the first break, after a line out, with Millar and Webb combining to set up Ben Williams for the score. With the conversion from the corner hitting the upright,

Maidstone had to be content with a final 36-14 scoreline but only congratulations could be heard from the spectators for this early Christmas spectacle.

The confidence of last week's comeback victory flowed through the team this week and underpinned this great win. Maintaining this level for the future will be the challenge in the weeks to come.

Maidstone

Ben Williams; Josh Pankhurst; Jack O'Connell: Ben Massy; Adam Knight: Jake Johnson; Lewis Stimpson; Hugh Cowan: Lucian Morosan; Harry Millar: Tom Waring; Alfie Paea; Craig Webb; Alex Eastwood: Rory Beech

Replacements: Andi Petelo; Charlie Williams; Jordan Ring (all used)

