

Match Report

London Division 1 (South)

Maidstone FC 12 v Medway RFC 20

Played at The Mote, Saturday 20th February, 2016



Local rivals, Medway, became the first club, for many a season, to complete the double over Maidstone, with this 12-20 win. While the final score that confirmed the margin of victory came late in the game, it was clear to a good-size crowd that the better side, on the day, had won.

Maidstone failed to reproduce the intensity they have shown in recent weeks and, for the first quarter, made little impression on the visitors. It was only their defence that kept them in the game for long periods, while some fundamental errors by the Medway pack, in try scoring positions, contributed to the close nature of the final score.





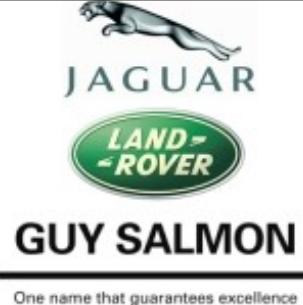







Maidstone could point to the absence of skipper Ben Williams, in the front row, and Alfie Paea, in the centre, as contributory factors in their lacklustre showing but, in reality, it was the lack of fire for long periods that came as a surprise. Medway have performed well in the league this season, building on the foundations that have served them well in the recent past, so the 'under-dog' label should have inspired Maidstone to cause another upset.

It was not to be and while there were some patches of incisive play, the spoils deservedly went to the Medway team.

On another heavy pitch, with a slight drizzle in the air, it was clear that conditions would be difficult. With Maidstone playing down the slope and with a faint breeze in their favour, it was also clear the first half would be important if Maidstone were to upset another side above them in the league. But it was not to be.

The first quarter of the game was played almost exclusively in the Maidstone half. The loss of the first two lineouts underlined the disparity in the teams in this period and in-





vited pressure on to the Maidstone line.

Medway opened their score on the quarter hour with a penalty on the Maidstone 22, for an illegal tackle, which Harvey converted to post a three point lead. Maidstone has a chance to match this, shortly there-after, but chose to kick for the corner,

to set up a catch and drive. But the kick lacked sufficient precision and went straight into the dead ball area, letting the visitors off the hook.

With the end of the quarter approaching, Maidstone were, at last, beginning to find their feet. Jack O’Connaill broke through a number of Medway tackles to take play from half way to the visitor’s 22, before passing inside to Harry Millar, who then found Andi Petalo, on the charge. Could he have made the line, on his own? Probably, but he chose to pass inside and this last pass was intercepted, buoying the Medway defence and deflating Maidstone’s rising confidence at the same time.



While Maidstone’s line out was under constant pressure, the tight scrums also began to falter and what could have been a further scoring opportunity on the Medway 5-metre line led to a turnover, when the pack was pushed off their own ball. With these glaring weaknesses in the tight, it was no wonder that Maidstone found it difficult to mount consistent pressure on the visitors.



But almost against the run of play, it was Maidstone that scored next to gain the lead. A penalty was punted to touch, just outside the Medway 22. The resultant catch and drive worked to perfection and the pack knifed through the defending visitor’s eight, for Richie Bowen to get the touch down. Harry Millar’s kick, from the

touch line, gave Maidstone a 7-3 cushion with half-time approaching.

But on the cusp of half-time, it was the interception of a Millar pass by Medway centre, Dance, deep in the Medway half, that flipped the scoreline, once again. The routine conversion by Harvey gave Medway a deserved three point lead to take into the break.

Early pressure by Medway put Maidstone on the back foot for the first period of the second half, leading to another Harvey penalty on ten minutes extending their lead. With Medway controlling the ball well and looking sharper in



all departments, it was only dogged defence that kept Maidstone within a score until the last five minutes of the game.

The heavy pitch began to drain the legs and for much of the half, the game deteriorated to a series of penalties. Medway could have extended their lead in this period with attacking scrums on the Maidstone 5-metre line but poor execution allowed the Maidstone defence to come out on top in these mini-battles.

But the move of the match, started by the visitor's No 8, Gardner, deep in Medway's half, saw the ball move decisively to full back, Wardzynski, coming into the line, to feed winger, Ebanks, for a simple touch down. A touch-line conversion by Harvey gave Medway the two-score margin they had been seeking all the half and for all intents and purposes, the game was put to bed.

Maidstone refused to lie down, however, and with the game deep into injury time, a spell of pressure in the Medway 22 led to a try by right wing, Waring, in the corner. Millar's conversion struck the post and bounced out, so preventing even a consolation losing bonus point to send the home side back to the clubhouse with no rewards for their endeavours.

But in reality, Maidstone deserved nothing from this game. For much of the time they lacked intensity and made too many wrong choices. On this occasion, the league position reflected the playing abilities of the sides on the pitch. Maidstone were well beaten and need to reflect on the reasons for this.

Maidstone

Andi Petalo; Josh Pankhurst; Jack O'Connaill; Ben Massy; Hugh Cowan; Rob Field; Richie Bowen; Jake Eaglesham; Lucian Morosan; Harry Millar; Tom Waring; Craig Webb; Alex Eastwood; James Douglas; Rory Beech

Replacements: Will Fox; Lewis Stimpson; Josh Smith

