

## Match Report

London Division 1 (South)



Maidstone FC 17 v Sutton & Epsom RFC 17

Played at The Mote, Saturday 16th January, 2016



After the disappointment of losing to Chiswick, Maidstone had a lot to prove in this first game of the New Year. One might say credibility was at stake: certainly a game to prove they could mix it with the best in the league, which they did with this 17-17 draw. A case could be made that they should have won but this would be harsh on an opposition that defended tenaciously and got the rough end of a key scoring decision.





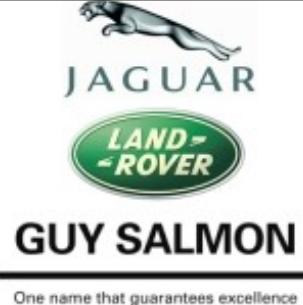







The return of Ben Williams was important, not only to shore up the front row but to motivate the side, which he did throughout. Jack O'Connail was also prominent, earning himself the man-of-the-match award for his work in the loose, as well as his contribution to the tight. Compared to the game away at Sutton earlier in the season, where the pack spent the whole afternoon going backwards, this was a splendidly solid performance from the eight as a whole. In the loose, Jake Eaglesham was prominent on his return to the No.8 position and, together with the rest of the back row, showed what has been missing in his absence.

But the vital ingredient, where Maidstone were truly superior to the opposition, was in the three-quarter line. Unfortunately, their opportunities were limited but they stretched the Sutton defence on a number of occasions and, with better control of the ball, could have sealed an unexpected victory.

After all the recent rain, leading to last week's game being postponed, the pitch was heavy but on a cold, crisp afternoon Maidstone started the game with clear intent to take the game to the league leaders. Sutton had barely got their hands on the ball when Maidstone opened the scoring after eight minutes. A catch and drive took the ball from half way into the visitor's 22, and, following a number of thrusts at the line,







Pitkin fed Harry Millar to touch down wide on the left. A fine conversion secured a seven point lead and Sutton knew they had a game on their hands.

But from this point, the opposition got themselves into the game and controlled the ball and field position for the next fifteen minutes. With Maidstone trapped in their own 22 and

seemingly unable to relieve the pressure, it was only a matter of time before Sutton crossed the line. A line out on the Maidstone 22 proved the ultimate catalyst, with No. 8, Whitaker, releasing a quick move to bring left wing, Ghumra, into play through the centre to score under the posts. The conversion for Hurley was a formality, bringing the scores level on 25 minutes.

An injury to Hugh Cowan saw him replaced by Lewis Stimpson but, with their tails up, Sutton continued to seek territory, and ten minutes later their pressure, once more, paid off. A penalty allowed them to set up another line out in the Maidstone 22 and, when their direct drive to the line through multiple forward drives was thwarted, they spun the ball



wide to the right wing, where prop, Bruce was lurking, and his cut back inside was enough to get him the touchdown. A fine conversion from Hurley gave Sutton a 14-7 half-time lead but with Maidstone playing down the slope in the second half, all was to play for.

With the home team back line coming more into the game, benefiting from a quicker service once Morosan replaced Pitkin at scrum half, a sweeping move after a good break by Alfie Paea, took the game deep into the Sutton 22. While the initial thrust was held by some diligent defence, Maidstone camped on the visitor's line and Morosan managed to sneak round the scrum to touch down by the posts, on the quarter hour. With the referee unsighted,



Maidstone benefitted from a knock-on when the try was awarded but there was no denying that the pressure they were now applying deserved the score and with Millar converting the try, the scores were back level again.

Two penalty decisions in the next ten minutes ultimately decided the outcome of the game. With Maidstone now playing predominantly in the Sutton half, a decision to opt to go for touch rather than goal, in what was an eminently kickable position, proved costly as Sutton defended the subsequent lie out with





tigerish intent. A second opportunity, in an easier position, five minutes later, was converted to give Maidstone a three point lead, but the nagging doubt over the earlier decision, ultimately proved costly.

Sutton's great strength, throughout, was their ability to control the ball once they had it, without making mistakes, and while this did not trouble the Maidstone defence, it ultimately drew penalty opportunities and with the game drawing to a close, a simple opportunity in front of Maidstone's posts was tucked away by Hurley to draw the scores level again.

And so, the game ended. Maidstone's defence was more than equal to Sutton's last throw of the dice, while the greasy ball and a pitch now beginning to cut up, scotched any home attempts to steal the game.



In summary, this was the antithesis of the Chiswick game. The side was fully focused and competitive in all areas and with a bit more luck, could have secured all the points. Regardless, this should breed confidence for the encounters to come.

#### Maidstone

Ben Williams; Josh Pankhurst; Jack O'Connail: Ben Massy; Adam Knight: Hugh Cowan; Jake Johnson; Jake Eaglesham: Ben Pitkin; Harry

Millar: Tom Waring; Alfie Paea; Craig Webb; Alex Eastwood: Rory Beech

Replacements: Andi Petalo; Lewis Stimpson; Lucian Morosan (all used)

