

Match Report

London Division 1 (South)

Charlton Park RFC 16 v Maidstone FC 16

Played at Kidbrooke, Saturday 5th September, 2015



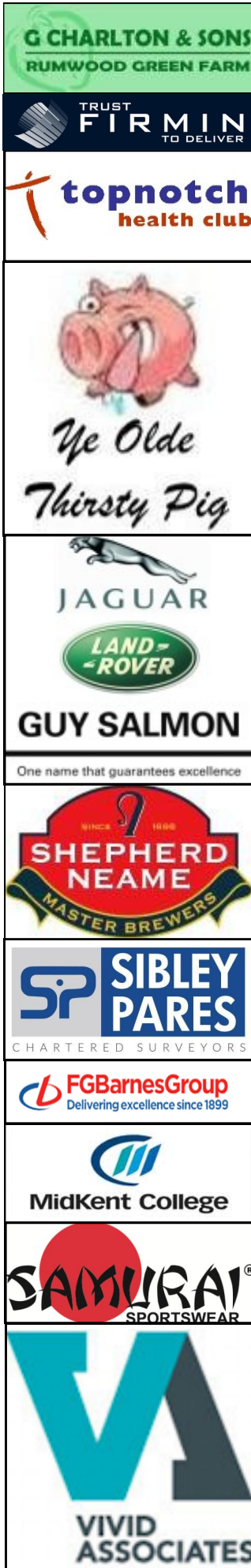
When these two sides last met they finished the season in first and second place, with the county town side just missing out on promotion in the playoffs. Since then Charlton Pk have consolidated their position in London 1 and the visitors went on to have a fine season to achieve their own promotion. That said, it was a much changed side from that sunny day in May at Twickenham that took to the pitch in this first league outing of the season. At the end of a match that for long periods lacked any real fluency and in which Maidstone never really came to grips with the referee, both sides will probably feel that they let the match slip as they ended honours even with a 16-16 draw, although despite salvaging a draw with the last kick of the match, it is probably Maidstone that will feel that they allowed a win to slide away from them.

In a Maidstone side that was always going to feature a significant number of changes from the last campaign and despite a large number of early season unavailability and injuries the county town club were able to demonstrate their depth in fielding what was still a strong side for this encounter. In the front row Steve Doughty occupied the hooker berth between the settled prop pairing of skipper Ben Williams and Joel Byford. A new look 2nd row partnership saw Adam Knight and Tom Chandler, whilst new recruit Hugh Cowan occupied the No8 berth in the absence of injured Mike We-rahiko, with Richie Bowen and Jake Johnson on the flanks. The back line saw Ben Pitkin and Harry Millar as the half backs with a centre pairing of Craig Webb and Jonno Skelton and Tom Waring, Rory Beech and Lucien Morosan occupying the back three positions. Cover on the bench was provided by Luke Debnam and Jack O'Connell for the forwards with DJ Kannemeyer for the backs division.



With the visitors having the advantage of the slope the early play was in the home sides territory, although with both sides making unforced errors the first





minutes of this encounter were somewhat disjointed. It was Charlton Park that seemed to get into their stride the quickest although they were somewhat helped by the visitors high penalty count that gave them both possession and the opportunity to gain territory. It was from one such penalty that they posted their first points as they converted the goal attempt from just outside the 22m. Maidstone's response was almost immediate as they put the hosts under pressure from the restart, winning a penalty that Pitkin calmly converted to level the scores at 3-3.



Much of the play was contested in midfield and whilst Charlton Park were able to generate some continuity, Maidstone's failure to respond to the referee's interpretations was not helping their cause, although when they were able to generate some possession and continuity they did look threatening. With an attack down the right by Skelton

towards the end of the first quarter ended when the support got in the way of each other; Charlton park never effectively cleared their lines and a poor kick field by Pitkin released Beech to feed man of the match Bowen wide on the left who was able outpace the home defence to cross wide out but touchdown under the posts, with Millar adding the extras Maidstone had a 3-10 lead and looked like getting into their stride.

The lead was extended when the host made a mess of the restart and were penalised at the subsequent scrum, with skipper Williams pointing at the posts Millar calmly slotted a 50m penalty to take Maidstone out to a 3-13 advantage.



At a point when the visitors should have been able to play with a bit more fluency, some petulance and indiscipline put them under pressure and with the penalty count having built up through the half, on the 26th minute Byford was the offender that brought an end to the referee's patience and received a yellow card. As was the case last season, when reduced to 14 men Maidstone's discipline appeared to tighten up and despite sustained pressure from the home side their defence held firm as they held their opponents at bay for the next 10 minutes. Maidstone were restored to full complement just before the interval, but no sooner was Byford back on when Johnson was on the wrong side of the referee's whistle and despatched for 10 minutes. Charlton Park then reduced the deficit with the last kick of the half with a penalty from under the posts with Maidstone leading 6-13 at the interval.



Despite still being a man down Maidstone started the second half the brighter of the two sides, although a good opportunity by Charlton Park went begging when having created a two man overlap they failed to move the ball quickly enough. With Maidstone restored

to a full complement they also made changes with O'Connell on for Chandler meaning Cowan moved to his more accustomed role in the second row.

This appeared to strengthen the set piece and from a scrum close to the hosts line Maidstone were unlucky not to score as the ball was spilled with the line at their mercy. The end of the third quarter saw the backs combine to make a good break out of their own half, with Skelton and Waring combining well as they attacked down the right flank only to be bundled into touch 10m short of the line. Going into the last quarter Morosan moved to scrum half as Kannemeyer came on to the left wing. A Charlton Pk penalty shortly after reduced the deficit to 9-13, although a simple opportunity to cancel that out shortly after was missed what looked a simple kick drifted just right of the posts.



As normal time drew to a close Maidstone were penalised inside their own half and instead of taking the kick Charlton Pk opted for the scrum and an opportunity to win the match, a good shove from the home pack saw the referee walk to the posts to award the penalty try as the front rows stood up and with the conversion a formality the home side were in the lead 16-13.

With the referee indicating there were four minutes of added time and with the home side to receive the



kick all they needed was to retain possession and their discipline to run the clock down. However, Maidstone, playing catch up rugby for the first time in the match managed to regain possession and having demonstrated some good continuity continued to drive at the home defence. Eventually their discipline cracked and with Millar converting the penalty with the last kick of the match the final whistle blew with the scores at 16-16.

In summary this was a match in which Maidstone somewhat stuttered, showing only flashes of their potential with ball in hand. Whilst skipper Williams felt there were plenty of positives to take from this first competitive match of the season. There are areas that still need some work and discipline will need to tighten up to reduce the penalty count.

Maidstone: Williams, Doughty, Byford, Chandler, Knight, Johnson, Bowen, Cowan, Morosan, Millar, Webb, Skelton, Waring, Beech. **Replacements:** Debnam, O'Connell, Kannemeyer (all used)

