



## Match Report

London Division 1 (South)

Maidstone 10 v Tottonians 19

Played at The Mote, Saturday 03 October, 2015



After two successive defeats, on the road, Maidstone were hoping to get back to winning ways on a return to the Mote. But it was not to be, as they went down to fellow 'promotees' from last season, Tottonians, by nineteen points to ten.

While the home side made a late surge and might have nicked the result, this would have denied the superior teamwork and efficiency of the visitors who executed a simple, but effective, game plan. The control exerted through their No 8 and fly half, especially in the first half, was a sufficient platform for them to dominate the exchanges, playing off the front foot and denying Maidstone territory.

Added to some poor tackling, allowing the visitors to get past the gain line on too many occasions, and indiscipline at the breakdown, this was enough to carve out a narrow victory for the visitors and condemn Maidstone to their first home defeat for over two years.

But, in essence, this is a new Maidstone team that is having to learn on the job in a harsher, more unforgiving environment. Half the team are new this season and finding the best combinations is an evolving process.

With this in mind, changes were made to both the pack and back line in an effort to find that missing

ingredient to spark an improved performance. Rory Beech was switched from full back to scrum half, with Lucian Morosan moving to the left wing, while Tom Waring took up the full back role. In the pack, Matt Iles retained the No 8 position after his strong showing last week from the bench, with Hugh Cowan mov-





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ing to blind side flanker and Jake Johnson to openside. The return of Joel Byford added stability to the front row, while Josh McKenzie stepped up to replace the absent Josh Pankhurst.

Unfortunately, this major revamp to the team did not have an immediate or positive impact. In an error strewn half, with little cohesion and a number of dropped passes, Tottonians were allowed to establish themselves in Maidstone's half and on seven minutes got themselves on the scoreboard with a try in the right hand corner. With the added conversion by fly half, Searle, their early cushion was ultimately sufficient to win the match.

Maidstone hit back just before the half hour, when Harry Millar converted a penalty, having missed one a few minutes earlier, but with Tottonians playing a simple but efficient game, Maidstone were finding it difficult to penetrate a well organised defence.

Tottonians could have been further ahead at the half way stage but a penalty attempt, just past the half hour, hit the post and rebounded safely to allow Maidstone's lines to be cleared but a drop goal



compensated to establish a 10-3 half time lead. With improving cohesion in the home side as the half time whistle beckoned, prospects for greater fluidity in the second half were contemplated. And so it proved.



Maidstone started the second half in a more aggressive and up-tempo mood. But with Craig Webb having to leave the field after five minutes with a knee injury, a further revamp to the back line was required with, new recruit, DJ

Kannemeyer, coming on at fly half and Harry Millar moving to outside centre.

With the scrum now exerting pressure on the visitors eight, Maidstone began to show improved form but a high tackle gave away a penalty just inside their own half and Tottonians were unlucky to see the attempt by Searle, once again, strike the post. But he made amends, just at the end of the third quarter, when a penalty in a similar position was advanced ten



metres for back-chat, presenting a simple three points to add to the visitors' margin.

With Kannemeyer prompting some speedy and inventive passing, Maidstone were posing an increasing threat but sustained pressure through a number of phases was insufficient to unravel the Tottonians' defence. From a good position in the visitors 22, Maidstone lost the ball and Tottonians turned the tables, with some good interplay, to win another penalty in the Maidstone 22, to stretch their lead to thirteen points.



At this point, Maidstone's first line tackling began to show signs of cracking and, with Tottonians looking sharper in movement and thought, the prospects for the last period of the game did not look auspicious. In addition, with a concerted spell of pressure on the Maidstone line on the half hour mark, only some desperate defence prevented the try. But with Morosan yellow carded and a penalty conceded, Tottonians stretched their lead to 19-3.

With all seemingly lost, Maidstone managed to raise themselves for a final assault on the visitor's defences. Tottonians line speed in defence remained high throughout this period but with inevitable errors induced by Maidstone's pressure, penalties ensued and, at the second attempt, a catch and drive in the Tottonians' 22 yielded a dividend.

With the initial drive held, quick recycling of the ball allowed Kannemeyer to feed inside to Alex Eastwood to crash over by the posts, giving an easy conversion for Millar and reducing the deficit to nine points. But with Maidstone a man light for this period, they couldn't repeat the exercise and had to be content with this consolation.

So, what to conclude from this game? The team is still a work in progress: the pack is looking more solid in the tight and line out but could benefit from greater dynamism from the back row: the back line lacks the cutting edge of last season and overall, the defence needs to be tighter. The transition continues.

### **Maidstone**

Ben Williams; Josh McKenzie; Joel Byford: Adam Knight; Ben Massey: Hugh Cowan; Jake Johnson; Matt Iles: Rory Beech; Harry Millar: Lucian Morosan; Craig Webb; Jonno Skelton; Alex Eastwood: Tom Waring

Replacements: Steve Doughty; Lewis Stimpson; DJ Kannemeyer

