

Match Report

Maidstone 43 v Pulborough 0

by Trevor Langley

League: London 3 SE

Home at The Mote, Saturday 6 October, 2012 Kick Off – 3.00 pm



Newly promoted Pulborough were an unknown quantity on their first visit to The Mote but it was clear from coach, Andy Foley's team selection that he was not taking them lightly. And, despite the eventual margin of victory, the 43-0 score line did the visitors scant justice for their effort and determination.

However, if there was a lesson to be taken by Maidstone from this game, it was that early scores can lead to undue openness in play, before true authority has been established. It was a lesson taken to heart in the second period and no harm was done but against a better side, the outcome could have been different.

With Matt Iles stating his preference to play in the back row and brother, James, still finding his feet in the second row, after a spell out of the game, both moved down to the Mustangs this week with James Davies returning to the three quarter line and debutant, Alex Sterzu, coming into the second row. A third change was to start Josh McKenzie at hooker, with Sam Bailey on the bench.



But, with the core of last week's team in place, expectations were high for a continued performance of power rugby and within five minutes of the start those expectations were fulfilled. Richard Parker picked up from the back of the first scrum on the ten metre line and outpaced the defence to the line. With Jason

Smith adding the conversion, a seven point cushion looked like the start of a rampaging afternoon.

This was not what happened. While the pace at which Maidstone played remained high, execution left something to be desired and three further try-scoring chances went begging along with the opportunity to add to the points total from a penalty in the Pulborough 22. After twenty minutes, rather



than find themselves clinging on for dear life, Pulborough were still in the game and beginning to find space for their own attacks. In addition, Maidstone began to run foul of the referee's interpretation of the law and a succession of penalties both broke up play and eventually saw Sterzu shown a yellow card just past the half hour.

Maidstone's rhythm was further disrupted when flanker Ben Hunter left the field after a knock on the head, resulting in a reshuffle in the pack. Only at the last did Maidstone begin to show the cohesion apparent in the first quarter but the impression that lingered over the half-time break was for a radical tactical rethink, with a back-to-basics element strongly in mind.



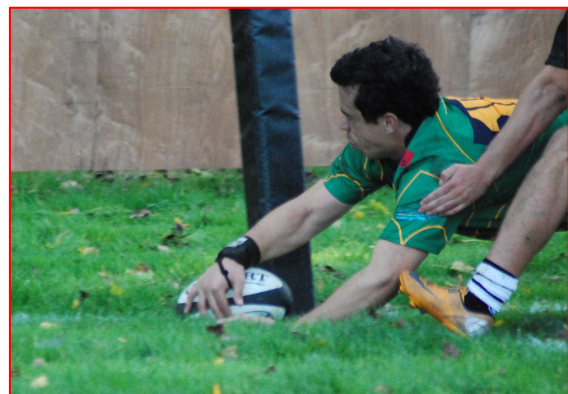
And this is exactly what happened. Starting fast out of the blocks, full back, Walkling chipped to touch deep in the Pulborough 22 and, from the subsequent line out, Maidstone won the ball, spreading it left and then back right for prop, Danny Baker, to go over in the corner.

Further pressure by Maidstone saw winger Smith run back a kick from Pulborough that failed to make touch, which was taken on by

Neil Graves deep into the opposition 22. From the resultant scrum, skipper, Ben Williams was on hand to claim his weekly try by the posts, with Smith adding the conversion to establish a 19 point lead with ten minutes gone.

Maidstone continued to pressure the opposition both through the forwards and backs, one catch and drive taking play from inside their own half into the visitor's 22. With both further replacements on the field, a knock on the head to scrum half, Morosan, with twenty minutes gone, could have seen a reversion to a more forward oriented style. But, instead, a succession of tries in the last quarter started by Willie Brown and Mark Dorman, with Richard Parker claiming a second and Jason Smith topping it off with a try and conversion of his own.

After the stuttering first half, Maidstone showed what might have been with a convincing second half display. There is little doubt that this squad



of players contains the balance of power and skill that has been absent for a number of years. Harnessing these attributes into a consistent level of performance remains the challenge for Andy Foley off the field and skipper, Ben Williams, on it.

A number of weaknesses remain, however. For example, the team needs to pay greater attention to what the referee is telling them. In the first half, Maidstone made their own lives more difficult by not heeding his messages, whatever they may have been. Sides more organised than Pulborough could have taken greater advantage of this weakness and, with less disparity in power and skill, it could have been the key factor in deciding the final outcome.



Ben Williams; Josh McKenzie; Danny Baker: Alex Sterzu; Lee Evans: Paul Hyland; Ben Hunter; Richard Parker: Lucian Morosan; Willie Brown: Jason Smith; Neil Graves; Mark Dorman; James Davies; Ivan Walkling: Replacements: Sam Bailey; Nick Bunyan; Dane Smith