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The Prince of Maidenhead Reigns Supreme

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Sutton & Epsom RFC 26 – Maidenhead 45. Saturday 4th March.

The Black & Whites returned to Rugby Lane in the knowledge that their race had been run this season. The men in magenta had torn them to shreds at Braywick Park in November and both squads were fully aware of that outcome. Despite the match having no consequence with regard to the league table or which cup competition would be entered both sides produced a thrilling spectacle played at breakneck pace with eleven tries to applaud. Maidenhead won by 45-26 but Sutton restored their pride with a performance that deservedly earned them a bonus point.

It might have been the first Saturday in March but there was no sign of spring in the air as Freddy Bunting started the match with a biting wind behind him. From the outset it was clear that the visitors were going to utilise their excellent back division and run the ball from anywhere. This scenario was no surprise to the hosts whose defensive line on the Berkshire 22 held firm despite several efforts to break free. Reluctantly Maidenhead cleared with the boot. S&E's first possession proved to be most productive. The covering Caddy charged towards the 22 and after several swift phases Alex Mawdsley's perfectly timed pass allowed Robbie Martey to score. Freddy Bunting added the conversion for 7-0.

That instant success focussed the Maidenhead minds and within five minutes they had not only drawn level but had taken the lead. Though Sutton safely secured the restart after a few phases near halfway the opted to kick. Their opponent countered at pace searching for space on the right before switching to the opposite flank. An arcing run by centre Harry Wells set up the prolific Alex Turton who ran round under the posts. Moments later Harry Wells turned from provider to scorer. A long clearance into the Surrey men's 22 was run back but the ball was turned over and the alert Harry Wells swept down the unguarded blindside to score. Greg Smith converted both scores and the boys from Braywick Park led 14-7 after a magnificent seven opening minutes.

There was no respite from the high tempo as both teams threw themselves headlong into attack. Equally both sides were demonstrating resolute defence. At the start of the second quarter the Black & Whites encamped within five minutes of glory. Jordan Huie went close, a 5-metre catch and drive was denied and a golden opportunity to level the scores was missed. Then to heap Pelion upon Ossa the visitors cleared their lines and scored with their next attack. Harry Wells was a central figure again as he put Greg Smith into space. The fly half burst into enemy territory and was only stopped by an excellent tackle by Alex Mawdsley but the ball was soon in the hands of Scott Prince who ran in the last 30 metres for the first of his three tries of the afternoon. Greg Smith, perfection personified, added the extras for 21-7.

Excellent Sutton defence from the restart regained possession and moments later the hosts had a penalty. A well-rehearsed lineout ploy saw George Drye rampage down the touchline. The ball was spun wide to the opposite flank where Jordan Huie was thwarted by excellent cover. A minute later it was Chris Farrell throwing himself at the line like a torpedo who went agonising close and a shrill blast from Mr Dixon's whistle gave Maidenhead a relieving penalty. Very soon relief became a form of cruel and unusual punishment. A speculative kick ahead by Scott Prince enjoyed a favourable bounce and the ball was transferred to fullback James Maddern who coasted home to score. Greg Smith celebrated the bonus point try with another conversion for 28-7.
With the interval rapidly approaching the hosts desperately needed some reward for their first half endeavours. It was now S&E's turn to run back a clearance kick and score. Robbie Martey evaded the first man, sped through the gap and drawing the retreating defence onto him he passed to Jamie See who did well to cover the last 10 metres to touch down. Freddy Bunting added the conversion as the referee concluded the first half with the magenta men 28-14 ahead.
Despite the score-line the Black & Whites had had the majority of the possession and territory as well as more minutes in their opponent's 22. However, the visitors were ruthless in exploiting any errors as well as additionally demonstrating scintillating back play.

Sutton enjoyed the perfect start to the second period with a try. Despite failing to secure the 5-metre lineout they regained possession and this time they were not to be denied close to the line. Appropriately George London was the scorer on an afternoon when he carried with relentless aggression and to great effect. Trailing 19-28 S&E were right back in the contest. It was now the turn of the Braywick Park boys to turn the screw in the Sutton 22. Time and again the Rugby Lane

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men scythed down the opposition but the Maidenhead team patiently retained possession until a long pass found Scott Prince who crossed the whitewash for the second time. Though the conversion drifted wide the visitors had a 14-point cushion leading 33-19 with half an hour to go. Despite dominating the next fifteen minutes with George Drye to the fore with rampaging runs synonymous of classic locks throughout the ages S&E erred at the crucial moment. Whether it was a lineout infringement or pressure from the organised and resolute opposition defence they failed to add to their score. To massage sodium chloride into the laceration Maidenhead needed the merest glimpse of a chance to see them adding to their account. A turnover near their line led to an audacious counter that saw captain Niall Crossley put into space and stride in from 40 metres. With Greg Smith having departed with an earlier injury scrum half Archie Dunnill took over the kicking duties and bisected the uprights for 40-19.

Making light of the latest setback Sutton continued the search for a fourth try and a bonus point. The remarkable pace of the game did not relent and the attacks rained down at either end. A jinking run by Dan Jones hinted at greater deeds. Then five minutes later Alex Mawdsley made a break on halfway but his errant pass was gathered by Scott Prince who needed no second invitation to sprint in unopposed to complete his hat trick. The challenging conversion drifted wide and Maidenhead led 45-19. The game entered time added on and the Black & Whites continued their quest for the Holy Grail of the bonus point. Agonisingly they were held up over the line. Then with the final play of the afternoon there was at last ecstasy after so much agony. Fittingly the score followed another charge from George Drye and an incisive burst from Robbie Martey to set up Freddy Bunting for his first league try for the Black & Whites. He failed to convert his score and the referee ended the contest with Maidenhead 45-26 victors.

In the end it was Maidenhead’s superior quality that told in an enthralling contest. Harry Wells was at the creative heart and wingers Prince and Turton were a constant menace with the former taking the glory with his triple. The Black & Whites more than played a supporting role in this fixture. The back row trio of Messrs Tame, London and Caddy were exceptional as they tackled, harried and carried throughout. George Drye played like a man possessed, as ever Steve Munford tackled everything that moved and parenthood has not blunted Jamie See’s talents. For S&E it was an afternoon when every error was punished with brutal efficiency whilst they failed to make the most of their chances. That being said they took the game to one of the best attacking sides in the league from their early opening score to their bonus point try on the final play of the game and deserve great credit for their performance.

The season concludes for Sutton & Epsom next Saturday with the visit of Bracknell who defeated the Black & Whites on the opening day of the season. The kick off at Rugby Lane will be 3pm. It is hoped that a sizable crowd will be present to bid a found farewell to the departing quartet of Sam Hurley, James Caddy, Jamie See and George Drye who have given many years of devoted service to the team and have been instrumental in the club’s recent successes.

Sutton & Epsom
Alex Mawdsley, Jordan Huie, Sam Hurley, Jamie See, Robbie Martey, Freddy Bunting, Steve Munford, Tom Boaden, Chris Farrell ©, Will Lloyd, George Drye, Josh Glanville, Ben Tame, George London & James Caddy.
Replacements: (all used) Joe Reid, Dan Jones & Joe Lovatt.

Maidenhead
James Maddern, Scott Prince, Harry Wells, Niall Crossley ©, Alex Turton, Greg Smith, Archie Dunnill, Elio Mandozzi, Jake Leach, Finlay Glass, Brook Harvey-Smith, Mark Grimshaw, Chris Gill, William Macaulay & Ed Atkins.
Replacements: Dan Hostetler, Mykel Parrott & Charlie

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