

## Midlands 1

Bournville                      27pts                      v                      Newport                      23pts

Sometimes you give everything and get nothing and so it appeared last Saturday when, having overcome a 13-6 interval deficit, Newport worked their way back into a 13-23 lead with just nine minutes remaining. Bournville hit back almost immediately to make it 20-23 with six to go but a bizarre and controversial climax to the game saw Bournville take the spoils with a score on the final play.

At 20-23 Newport seemed to have secured the points but as the hosts threw caution to the wind a wild pass eluded everyone and went harmlessly into touch. Meanwhile Liam Holder had timed a "man and ball" tackle to perfection and despite trying to pull out collided with the would-be recipient, an extremely harsh yellow card ensued reducing Newport to fourteen. Bournville put the penalty into the corner but then knocked on at the lineout giving Newport the scrum. All they had to do was win the scrum and put the ball off the field.

This should have been a simple task given that they had out-scrummaged the Bournville pack all afternoon to the point where the hosts were taking line-outs instead when given the option. Why on earth would Newport then collapse their own scrum when they were so dominant? A sensible enough question but referee Mr Lewis, possibly intimidated by the home crowd who were now baying for blood and had been very vociferous all afternoon, mysteriously awarded the penalty to Bournville.

The hosts went patiently through the phases battering away for the all-important score before spinning it wide to score in the corner that Holder would have been defending had he remained on the pitch.

Final circumstances apart it had been a scintillating and absorbing contest with no quarter given by either side and a credit to the quality of the rugby being played at this level.

First choice wingers Sam Hughes and Jamie Robinson were both otherwise engaged for this crucial fixture and were replaced by James Plumb, included in the starting line-up for the first time, and Josh Evans. Ash Paterson resumed at scrum half after missing the last two games. The pack was the same one that demolished Wolverhampton the previous week. Grant Cowe, Carwyn Howells and Neil Weston made up the bench.

Newport started brightly and were soon rewarded for their early pressure with a Holder penalty after four minutes but they then made a hash of the re-start allowing Bournville to go through several phases in the Newport twenty two before spinning it wide for a try in the corner to make it 5-3 after six minutes.

Plumb, who made a very encouraging debut, made a great break mid-way through the half but failed to spot Henry Vaka on his outside and was brought to ground when a try looked certain. Monty Maule then cleared Newport lines

with a raking touch find down the right hand flank. Bournville knocked on at the line out where Jake Goulson, Mike Venn and Kirk Robinson were constantly at their disruptive best. Newport got the shove on at the scrum and with Bournville in rapid retreat the penalty was conceded, Holder converting to make it 5-6 after eighteen minutes.

Bournville inched back in front 8-6 with a penalty of their own on twenty six minutes, a lead that would probably have been extended had another penalty decision not been reversed in Newport's favour. Newport were giving far too many penalties away at this stage bringing pressure upon themselves and it soon told when after a period of pressure Bournville released it wide for another try in the right hand corner, the difficult conversion missed as was a simpler penalty attempt on half time which meant it remained 13-6 at the break.

Newport didn't have to wait long to get themselves back on level terms, a Holder penalty to within fifteen, catch and drive before Maule danced through a gap and fed Chris Perry who had an outstanding afternoon to score by the posts, Holder's conversion equalling things up at 13-13.

Newport's front row of Jack Wells, Tom Cowell and Jon Evans were superb throughout in a dominant display and with Parker restored to the second row there appears to be an excellent balance to the eight which has not been quite this evident as the season has gone by. Carwyn Howells had replaced Jake Bates on the blindside and it was he who combined with Cowell and Robinson on another catch and drive that saw the ball released to the supporting Maule who glided through for a fine try, again converted by Holder to make it 13-20. Holder then added a long range penalty to make it 13-23 with nine to go.

A fine try by the hosts reduced their deficit to 20-23 before the last play drama unfolded bringing to an end what had been a pulsating contest and a 23-27 bonus point victory for Bournville that now leaves the title race wide open.

Team: Holder, Plumb, Perry, Vaka, Josh Evans, Maule, Paterson,  
Kirk Robinson, Venn, Bates, Parker, Goulson, Wells, Cowell (Captain)

Jon Evans

Bench: Cowe, Howells, Weston

Apart from a period in the first half where they were guilty of conceding too many penalties and a couple of wrong options from individuals in the second Newport have seldom played as well this season. They are still without doubt in prime position leading the table as they do by six points from Burton who visit Forton Road next on March 4<sup>th</sup> when kick-off will return to 3pm. Much will depend on the result and it promises to be a hard fought and tense affair very much like what was witnessed at Bournbrook last Saturday.

Written by: Chris Wilde