

## Slow start – Text book finish

Despite two spot-on midweek training sessions and an unhindered pre match routine, Newport yet again came out of the traps at a snail's pace. It's a trend that will garner the absolute focus of the coaching staff and team alike over the coming fortnight and I would lay good money that we do not see a repeat performance in the Dudley fixture.

Newport had barely laid hands on the ball, when in the third minute Crewe scored a well-taken try on the left flank, followed by an excellent conversion. Holder reduced the margin with a penalty on eleven minutes, but Newport were well below the high standard that they have set themselves and the home side were in the mood to attempt to take full advantage. A neat, high cross kick to the left corner saw Crewe record their second try with only thirteen minutes on the clock. Their kicker was this time unable to add the extras and the score stood at 12-3.

At the mid-point of the half Newport kicked a penalty to the corner, where a catch and drive gained 15 metres, before Jake Goulson broke away and charged forward towards the line. He was hauled down metres short, but quickly recycled ball passed through the hands of Leonard, Maule and Hughes, before Henry Vaka added to his already impressive tally of tries. A successful Holder conversion brought Newport within two points.

Although Newport did start to pick up the tempo of the game, the penalty count against them was also mounting and a transgression at a scrum in the thirtieth minute led to a successful Crewe penalty.

Clearly buoyed by their early dominance, Crewe were beginning to believe they could add to the high-flying scalps they have taken this season – Newport's chief title rivals Bournville and Burton having already come unstuck at the Vagrants Sports Club. A sustained period of strong drives by the Crewe pack was weathered by Newport, with no man giving any quarter and this defensive effort said everything about the solidarity and team spirit that has steadily grown this season within this group of players. They weren't playing to par, but they certainly weren't ready to roll over.

Crewe, it has to be said, were providing a stern test, but they did seem to be employing rehearsed tactics to slow the game down at every opportunity.

There were repeated stoppages, for the home physio to attend to, what transpired to be at worst, minor knocks and the setting of scrums and lineouts was done almost in slow motion. This continued throughout the second half and the refusal of Mr. Lefevre to take any action to allow unbroken periods of play, was a blight on an otherwise top drawer performance by the match official.

Little had to be said by the coaching staff at the break, the Newport team has leaders aplenty and they rallied their team-mates to take control of the game and its destiny.

Less than three minutes into the second period, another well-executed catch and drive, followed by a charge by Goulson led to a penalty. Jake Leonard, who had had a nervy first half, had the confidence to take a quick tap and he fed former Crewe player Kirk Robinson, who battered his way over the line near the left touchline. The value of Holder's accuracy with place kicks is immense and yet again he bisected the posts from the most difficult of angles.

Newport's lead was short-lived however and on four minutes the Crewe centres combined to score a superbly taken try. The conversion attempt being unsuccessful, Crewe now led 22-17.

For the remaining thirty five minutes Newport showed why they are sitting at the top of Midlands West 1. They regained a slender lead on thirteen minutes when good work by Goulson and Venn provided a platform for the ball to be spun wide into the hands of, yes you guessed it, arch try scorer Vaka. Then at 24-22 to the good, they controlled the game exquisitely and despite not scoring for over twenty minutes, never looked likely to lose their grip on the game.

A bonus point fourth try on thirty five minutes by skipper Tom Cowell, after good interchange between forwards and backs and another bulldozing charge by Kirk Robinson was quickly followed by a fifth which put the final nail in Crewe's coffin. A textbook driving maul took the ball fully 30 metres, before the ever-willing Goulson broke away and fed Kirk Robinson, who in turn off-loaded into the hands of fleet of foot prop Jon Evans to score. Holder's sixth successful kick gave a final scoreline of 38-22.

A great second half by all eighteen players, with Goulson, Venn and Kirk Robinson particularly impressive up front.

Moving forward, Newport can take great confidence from their ability to withstand pressure when not firing on all cylinders and even more so, for their capacity to put a complete stranglehold on the game when in control.