

## Midlands 1

Hereford                      22pts                      v                      Newport                      37pts

Newport made the long trek to Hereford without Jake Bates and Jon Evans, injured last week and with a number of players suffering from a virus that had hit the club during the week's build up so with Hereford desperate for points to avoid relegation this was never going to be an easy task. The threat of a possible points deduction hanging over the hosts only served to concentrate their minds even further and strengthen their resolve.

It was the same back division as last week with Carwyn Howells and Jordan Grass coming in to replace the injured duo in the pack.

Playing up the slope Newport made a lightening start to the game racing into a 0-12 lead after just four minutes. First Kirk Robinson made good yards into the Hereford half before feeding Henry Vaka who in turn offloaded to Chris Perry for the opening score which Liam Holder duly converted. Immediately from the re-start Jake Goulson, who was excellent throughout, made inroads into the Hereford defence before handing onto Vaka again, his perfectly timed pass sending winger Sam Hughes in for the second try.

Hereford then reduced the deficit to 3-12 after eight minutes when Newport were caught offside in midfield. Newport then failed to defend a neat chip through on thirteen minutes that bounced kindly for the on-rushing attack which resulted in a try by the left hand corner flag. Difficult conversion missed but Hereford right back in it at 8-12.

More Newport pressure then ensued with good handling from Hughes, Jamie Robinson and Holder eventually creating room for Nathan Parker to crash over and extend the lead to 8-17. There then followed a period where Newport were extremely wasteful with a number of chances before Vaka fielded a poor Hereford clearance which saw the ball run back at the hosts and Holder going in at the corner to make it 8-22 after thirty eight minutes.

Newport looked like going into the break with a healthy lead and the four point bonus point already in the bag before some sloppy tackling saw Hereford go in under the posts, the simple conversion bringing the half time score to 15-22

Skipper Tom Cowell was extremely unwell and replaced by Grant Cowe who again was able to make a telling contribution from the bench. It was all Hereford after the break and only some excellent defence spearheaded by Howells, Wells and Mike Venn kept them out. A rare break out of their own half saw Hughes tackled without the ball, a quickly taken tap spun wide where Kirk Robinson was able to put Holder into the corner and extend the lead to 15-27, much against the run of play it must be said.

Hereford were then given another chance to get back into the game when Venn was dispatched to the sin-bin on fifty nine minutes, the hosts wasting little time in sweeping home for a fine try after Newport had held the five metre

scrum despite being down to seven in the pack. Game on again as this reduced the margin to 22-27 and Hereford were very much in the ascendency but Newport managed to prevent any further damage whilst reduced to fourteen. A penalty to Newport, enhanced by some chit chat and thus advanced a further ten metres allowed Holder to slot the kick and take away the bonus point that on this performance Hereford very much deserved, extending the lead to 22-30.

Cowell had recovered just enough to return in place of Jordan Grass who had given his all and would be required for the North Midlands Under 20's the following day. Poor Newport tackling just inside the Hereford half saw them sweep up-field looking certain to score but Hughes appeared from nowhere to scythe down the attacker with a superb cover tackle.

With time running out and the game most likely lost Hereford went all out to reduce the margin of defeat to seven points or less and thus secure a losing bonus point which could at the final reckoning make all the difference to the relegation outcome. As time ebbed they were becoming desperate and it was no surprise when under a pressing Newport defence the ball was intercepted by Jamie Robinson who broke free before feeding Kirk Robinson to battle his way in under the posts for the final try, Holder adding the extras to bring matters to a close at 22-37.

Newport started and finished the game well but in between they were starved of possession and territory for long periods and it was their solid defence that would again ensure that they came out on top.

Team: Holder, Hughes, Perry, Vaka, Jamie Robinson, Maule, Paterson, Kirk Robinson, Venn, Howells, Parker, Goulson, Wells, Cowell (Captain), Grass

Bench: Cowe, Holmes, Plumb

Newport play their final home game of the season next Saturday when they entertain bottom of the table Kenilworth who are already relegated but are still capable of causing the odd upset, as they proved just the other week in putting 50 odd points on Worcester Wanderers. Everything points to a Newport win but they can take nothing for granted as they aim to take the Midlands 1 title with victory at Moseley Oak on the final day of the season. Anything less and they will face a nail-biting play-off match against Kettering who are on a 12 match winning run and haven't lost since before Christmas.

Written by: Chris Wilde