

Midlands 1

Newport 49pts v Wolverhampton 3pts

Still smarting from their poor performance at Whitchurch last time out Newport put together an outstanding all round team performance to brush aside their near neighbours from down the A41 and record a resounding victory that maintains their ten point lead at the top of the table.

A re-shuffle in the pack that saw Mike Venn return at open side, Jake Bates move across the back row to blind side, skipper Tom Cowell restored to the starting line up and Nathan Parker moved up into the second row resulted in a collective forward display that saw them dominate in all facets of the game.

Ben Burrows came in at scrum half for his first appearance and despite the odd misunderstanding with his colleagues produced a busy and competent display. Grant Cowe, Carwyn Howells and Josh Evans made up the bench.

Wolverhampton were given the benefit of the slope for the opening period but the game was only four minutes old when their defence was broken for the first time, a series of forward drives eventually releasing Henry Vaka who scythed through to go in under the posts, Liam Holder adding the extras for an early 7-0 lead. Worse was to come for the visitors when Chris Perry made a superb line break and after covering some forty metres fed the supporting Vaka who went in for his second, again converted by Holder to make it 14-0 after just nine minutes.

The visitors then slotted an easy penalty when Newport were caught offside in midfield to reduce the arrears to 14-3 but then missed two further shots at goal that would have reduced the deficit even further.

The rampant Newport pack were driving the visitors back at every set piece and were much stronger in the close quarter exchanges and at the breakdown where Venn had a cracking game, Kirk Robinson made countless yardage with his carries ably supported by Parker who looks more at home in the second row.

A series of penalties at scrum time five metres out eventually led to the inevitable and Holder again converted the penalty try to make it 21-3 after twenty six minutes. Bates then spent ten minutes in the "bin" following a high tackle but it made little difference. Cowell's all action return to the side appeared to have brought him a try but he was adjudged to have been held up over the line. It was only a temporary respite for the visitors, Kirk Robinson picking up from the base of the resultant scrum and forcing his way over by the posts, Holder converting to make it 28-3 at the interval.

Jake Goulson was his usual dominant figure at the lineout and Jon Evans continues to scrummage well and is also effective in the loose, developing a knack of producing valuable turnover ball. Following the return of Cowell, Jack

Wells has been restored to his preferred tight head position where he is again starting to excel.

The second period was only a couple of minutes old when Holder put a penalty to within fifteen metres of the Wolverhampton line. A well executed catch and drive was heading for another score before being hauled down illegally by the visitors resulting in a second penalty try of the day, Holder's conversion stretching the lead to 35-3.

With next Saturday's crunch visit to Bournville looming both Cowell and Vaka were withdrawn to be replaced by Cowe and Josh Evans but their absence made little difference as Newport continued to control proceedings. More forward dominance and excellently controlled driving play created enough havoc in the Wolverhampton ranks for the ball to be released quickly left where Sam Hughes scampered in at the corner, Holder adding an excellent touchline conversion to make it 42-3.

To their credit Wolverhampton never threw in the towel and continued to try and break down a resolute Newport defence that had been impenetrable throughout the afternoon. In attempting to run the ball from their own twenty two the ball was spilled and Perry crowned an excellent day's work by snapping up the loose ball and jinking his way over in the corner, Holder again converting sublimely to make it 49-3.

Carwyn Howells had come on for the last twenty minutes for what was his first team debut and he gave a good hard tackling account of himself in the final quarter. The game finished with Wolverhampton camped on the Newport line, trying desperately for a consolation score but Newport were in no mood to capitulate even with the game well won and some more aggressive and physical defending ensured they completed a very satisfactory "shutout" and a final score of 49-3.

Team : Holder, Hughes, Perry, Vaka, Jamie Robinson, Maule, Burrows, Kirk Robinson, Venn, Bates, Parker, Goulson, Wells, Cowell (Captain), Jon Evans

Bench: Cowe, Howells, Josh Evans

This was the performance that Bob Adams and his coaching team had been waiting for and sets them up nicely for next week's tough trip to Bournville who remain their main challengers for the title. The skills and character shown today will be required in abundance if they are to prevail where the hosts to date boast a 100% win record at home. The team would appreciate as much support as possible for what could be a season defining moment for both clubs. Kick-off is at 2.15.

Written by: Chris Wilde