

## The luck of Luctonians

This week saw the chopping and changing of fixtures. The Legion were scheduled to play Camp Hill at home in a league fixture but due to unforeseen circumstances, Camp Hill had to withdraw from the fixture midweek leaving the Legion with a home walk over but no fixture. The usual scenario now would be for everyone to scatter like Mexican's at the sound of an incoming Trump and to enjoy a week off. A quick message from manager, Mark Lowbridge put an end to that as the man with more contacts than Specsavers called up his old pals from Luctonians who had also had a league fixture cancellation and the wheels were set in motion for a friendly at The Novatonian Colosseum. Some players were excited, some were worried and some were just happy to be out in the open chasing a ball around like a Collie dog. Either way, this would be a massive test for the high flying Legion as Luc's are at the business end of the league above and have defeated the Legion heavily on every previous encounter.

The Legion named a very strong team for the fixture and as it was now billed as a friendly, also carried a large bench. With a stiff wind, Newport knew they'd be in for a tough 40 as Luc's chose to go down the infamous Forton Road hill with the breeze behind them. Weathering the initial pressure Luc's put on from the kick off saw the forwards set up a few phases before the 9, 10 combo of Potter and Thomas cleared the lines. Good tactical kicking from the backs saw the Legion march up the pitch and with relentless pressure from the pack from lineouts and scrums, Newport were soon within touching distance of the Luctonian's line. Hard running from Jake Lucas saw the centre cruise past 3 defenders before being held up just short of the line with Luc's forcing the turnover and clearing their lines.

With the Luc's strength in the backs and good pod support from their forwards, an end to end battle ensued but neither team were able to break the deadlock. On the 22 minute mark, the pack put together phase after phase on the half way line with Potter linking the forwards together like a butcher with sausages before feeding the back division. A well executed move in midfield saw Thomas break the backline who fed Pennells who made 30 metres before offloading to the onrushing James Plumb who dotted down under the posts for the first try of the game. Converting his own try, the score stood at 7-0 and the Legion were in the driving seat. For the next 10 minutes, Newport played an incredible mix of champagne rugby then gnarly rugby, controlling the territory and possession. A daring attack from Luc's saw them run the ball from their own 22 and a looping pass from the fly half was picked off by Twin 'A', James Riley (could of been Tom, no way to tell). Plumb again converting made the score 14-0 and with manager, Lowbridge not quite believing his eyes!

Trying to batten down the hatches and go in to the half time tea and biscuit break, Newport defended their line furiously but newly elected POTUS, Donald Trump was too eager to put up the wall and made sure that the young Mexican hooker could not gain access to the land of riches that was the Newport try line. However... under the new RFU health and safety guidelines, the referee called the HSE, and investigation was launched and Kendall was found to have failed the working at height training and he was despatched to the sinbin for 10 Minutes. Newport frantically defended their lines as Luc's played touchline to touchline, trying to exploit the extra man. After 7 or 8 phases, the ranks were eventually breached and Luc's scored in the corner to take the half time score to 14-5.

As this was listed as a friendly, changes were made for the second half as the bench was emptied. With many players having not played together, it became a struggle to continue the form and cohesion from the first half and Luc's piled on the pressure, crossing for their second try shortly after half time. Newport were further disadvantaged when Pennells responded to a blatant stamp from a Luc's player by landing a punch harder than a jumbo jet with no landing gear. The referee despatched Pennells to the naughty step but took no action against the Luc's player as he had been 'reminiscing about a match he took control of in 1975 between England Ladies and France Ladies' and he did not see the initial foul play.

Newport did hit back during the 10 minute period with a penalty from Plumb, taking the score to 17 - 10 but this was to be the last score from the Legion as Luc's took control of the game showing a great understanding of one another's game as they regularly trained together. This showed in the 52<sup>nd</sup> and 68<sup>th</sup> minute as they crossed for their third and fourth tries of the day.

Having defended for the majority of the second half, the Legion did launch a last ditch effort to salvage victory but after several phases and Luctonian penalties saw the ball turned over and Luc's duly ended proceedings by kicking the ball out.

Truly a game of two halves but although the Legion lost, they showed that they are able to mix it with a team in the league above. Could be a bit controversial but if the team trained together a bit more, they could become a real force and challenge the best teams in the area.

Well done to all the debutants today and special mentions for the performances of Gnosall loanee's Tom and James Riley.

Onwards and upwards! The Legion have break for a week when they return on 11<sup>th</sup> February away at Wolverhampton. Newport won the early season fixture by just one point in one of the most competitive games of the season so far so will have to be on top of their game to come away with maximum points and keep the promotion dreams alive!

VIVA LA LEGION

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