

## North Midlands Cup

Bridgnorth                      16pts                      v                      Newport                      18pts

Newport came through a nail-biting encounter at the EDG in front of a large crowd keen to see Shropshire's two senior sides lock horns in the first of what will be three meetings between the clubs this season. It was far from a classic but an absorbing contest nevertheless and one which could have gone either way.

Newport were always ahead but never comfortable enough to be in control and they could easily have been knocked out had a late long range Bridgnorth penalty not struck the upright and bounced out to safety.

The game was frantic, fractious, full of incident and littered with cards as both teams lost their discipline at key moments as almost always seems to be the case when local rivals clash in any sport. Both teams were penalised heavily at the breakdown throughout and neither line-out functioned particularly well so both teams were unable to build any sustained period of pressure or territory.

Some late confusion in the Newport ranks when following Dave Archer's involvement in a car crash Toby Mann slotted in at full back whilst Oli Buckley was selected ahead of Kirk Robinson who missed out altogether, Nathan Parker making the bench ahead of him whilst Tom Cummings filled the gap caused by Mann's call up.

Tom Cowell won the toss for the visitors and chose to play up the slight slope and it was they who struck first after just eight minutes when after some good driving phases Ash Paterson sniped round the fringes to score, Liam Holder converting for a 0-7 lead.

Bridgnorth were only able to escape from their own half with a good kicking game but equally when they were able to threaten the Newport defence was exceptionally strong all afternoon where Buckley set an excellent example throughout.

Sixteen minutes gone and Newport played a penalty advantage and Monty Maule went on a mazy run from his own half evading several tacklers on the way to score in the left hand corner although the home contingent were claiming he had failed to ground the ball properly. No video referees here and the try was awarded, Holder couldn't convert but Newport very clearly in the ascendency at 0-12.

Bridgnorth reduced the arrears on twenty one minutes with a penalty from half way before another was pulled narrowly wide from a similar position just moments later. And then the cards began to flow! All the pressure was being exerted in the Bridgnorth red zone and a first yellow appeared on twenty seven minutes followed by another on thirty three reducing the home side to thirteen at one stage.

Incredibly Newport could not manufacture another score against depleted ranks due partly to their own poor execution and wrong options but also to the dogged defence and spirit of a determined opposition. Better decision making and the game could have been put to bed in this short period before the break but worse was to follow for the visitors when Paterson got involved in some retaliation and was despatched to the bin whereupon Bridgnorth knocked over the penalty to trail just 6-12 at the break when it could, and perhaps should, have been a much wider margin.

Bridgnorth were playing well enough but just couldn't force their way into positions from which to exert pressure and were largely restricted to long range penalty attempts, another attempt pulled wide before Holder knocked over a simple one to make it 6-15.

Rhys Morgan was a constant menace making several bullocking runs that needed three or four to halt his progress whilst also producing vital turnovers in defence. Will Roach and Jack Wells were also carrying well but Newport were unable to take full advantage. Bridgnorth then worked their way into the Newport twenty two on fifty six minutes but a spear tackle on Jason Francis, nothing malicious but dangerous nevertheless, saw match official Mr Caunt brandish a red card that meant they would see out the match with fourteen.

As is often the case this appeared to galvanise the side that is punished and so it proved with Bridgnorth giving it everything in the last twenty to try and snatch an unlikely victory but mighty close they came, another long range penalty and it was 9-15, Holder responding with one of his own 9-18 after sixty six minutes.

With twelve remaining Bridgnorth camped on the Newport line and battered away playing several penalty advantages to score by the posts for a converted try that made it 16-18 but crucially also saw Holder sent to the bin for infringements in the red zone.

Finally Bridgnorth's chance came with eight minutes remaining but the penalty attempt struck the post and Maule tidied up, putting the clearance kick deep into the Bridgnorth half. Newport thankfully now had their game management heads on and played out the remainder of the game in and around the Bridgnorth twenty two from where the hosts were unable to break free.

A pulsating cup encounter that sees Newport progress to face holders Bournville away in the Semi-Final on 18<sup>th</sup> November although there is a chance the fixture will be played as a double header at Newport the previous week when the two teams meet in the League.

Newport return to league action next Saturday with a trip to Old Halesonians who are currently propping up the Midlands Premier Division with five losses to date. Kick Off is at 3pm.

Team: Mann, Holder, Perry, Vaka, Francis, Maule, Paterson, Buckley, Morgan, Venn, Roach, Goulson, Wells, Cowell (Captain), Grass

Bench: Evans, Parker, Cummings

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