

Midlands Premier Division

Bridgnorth 28pts v Newport 37pts

Newport continued their dominance over their Shropshire rivals making it four consecutive wins after contests between the two clubs resumed a couple of years ago. In truth the win was far more convincing than the score-line would suggest with Bridgnorth adding two converted tries with the final plays to claim a four try bonus point and give a more respectable slant on things.

Most observers would accept that the damage was done by Newport's big and powerful ball carrying forwards, most notably Nathan Parker, Jack Wells, Oli Buckley, Will Roach, Tom Cowell and the highly impressive Kirk Robinson which forced Bridgnorth to live off scraps of possession in their search for parity.

Newport were without Dave Archer (work commitments) and both their recognized open side flankers, Rhys Morgan and Jack Price were sidelined by injury so a re-shuffle was required amongst the forwards whilst Toby Mann filled in for Archer.

The visitors started brightly and the pattern of the game was set when hard yards and ball retention at the breakdowns resulted in Newport getting in behind the home defence which did well to weather this early storm before fly half Monty Maule, who had an outstanding game behind a dominant pack, slotted over a penalty after eleven minutes to open the scoring.

What scraps they were getting, they used highly effectively and Bridgnorth hit back immediately after some uncharacteristically poor one-on-one tackling let them in under the posts, the simple conversion giving them a most unexpected 7-3 advantage much to the delight of the home following.

Newport hit back immediately though as yards were gained by Roach, Buckley and Mike Venn before Robinson crashed over in the corner, Maule converting for 7-10. Some more good phases from the visitors could have brought a further score but the final pass to Sam Hughes was adjudged to have been forward. More Newport pressure in the red zone saw former Newport stalwart Jake Goulson yellow carded for a team offence and Newport opted for the scrum five out. It was held twice before the ball was moved left where Maule sliced through to make it 7-15.

Another set of sloppy tackling again cost Newport dear as Bridgnorth swept up-field on the counter to go in under the posts. A scuffed conversion attempt left the touch judges looking at one another quizzically but awarded by referee Carl Adams to bring the deficit back to just the one point in a game that had more or less been totally dominated by Newport.

A harmless looking set-piece forty metres out then saw Maule jink his way through some poor tackling to go in by the posts, the vice-captain taking a knock in the process so it was Liam Holder who tapped over the conversion to

make it 14-22 before a Bridgnorth attempt at a long range penalty fell just short right on half time.

Newport made a fine start to the second period when Roach took the restart on the full setting up a great position in the home twenty two but after a series of strong phases that looked likely to produce a score were penalised for not releasing and Bridgnorth were able to clear the danger. Having withstood this early onslaught Bridgnorth were beginning to build some dangerous looking phases of their own before Henry Vaka intercepted on his own twenty two sprinting a full seventy five metres to go in at the corner and extend the lead to 14-27.

Maule was kicking intelligently from hand and pinning the hosts back into their own twenty two, a penalty eventually resulting which Holder converted from in front to make it 14-30 and the game beginning to slip away from Bridgnorth despite there still being twenty five minutes remaining. Newport then weathered their own storm with some outstanding defence, eventually seeing Robinson hoofing the ball out of danger only for a wicked bounce allowing him to re-gather on half way having chased his own kick, Bridgnorth conceding the penalty which Holder put into the home twenty two, more good phases seeing Hughes squeeze in at the corner for Newport's fifth try, Holder thumping over a magnificent conversion from the touchline to make it 14-37.

With the game won Newport got lazy and a quick tap penalty saw Bridgnorth in for their third before a hack and chase caused havoc in the Newport ranks with no-one having the inclination to drop on the ball and tidy up the danger, resulting in a somewhat scrappy try but they all count and the consolation bonus point was secured. Nevertheless the clock was up and Newport had recorded another valuable five points with what was by and large a very impressive performance.

Team: Holder, Mann, Perry, Vaka, Hughes, Maule, Brown, Robinson, Buckley, Venn, Parker, Roach, Wells, Cowell (Captain), Evans
Bench: Grass, Jiminez, Adams

Peterborough Lions continue to march on with a 24-34 win up at Sandbach to record an eleventh successive victory and with it Newport's hopes of a play-off spot appear to be disappearing but they will be giving it their all to the very end and attempting to close the gap by becoming the first team to win at champions elect Birmingham & Solihull next Saturday where kick-off will be at 3pm.

Written by: Chris Wilde