

Newport Legion XV Vs Burton 'A' XV

28/10/2016 (Midlands Division 1 Reserve League)

A nasty bout of Chickungunya fever depletes the ranks, leaving the Legion vulnerable

This weekend saw the Legion entertain rivals Burton in the Division 1 Reserve League. With both teams newly promoted to this league and both making solid starts to the season, a thrilling encounter was expected at The Old Showground. With Burton taking the spoils in the 2016/17 League Cup Final, with a convincing victory over the Legion, all in the squad were pumped and ready for the match which Burton we all too well aware of.

As the squad was assembled early on in the week, it was clear that a very strong team was set to be fielded. Throughout the week, players from within the camp started showing signs of fever, fatigue and severe diarrhoea that required the changing rooms to be fumigated on several occasions. With players dropping like flies, the ranks became severely depleted as the Legion assisted the 1st XV absences with a number of call ups including Pennells, Hartshorne and Howells. All big holes to plug from the Legion squad.

From the moment Burton turned up and a player that can only be described as the love child of The Great Khali and Ronda Rousey, and wearing a 'Lithuania National Rugby' warm up top was seen ducking to get out of the changing room door, it was clear that this Burton side was vastly different from the team played the previous season. Kicking off down the infamous slope, the Legion exerted early pressure on the Burton line but with resolute defence, could not breach the line to score. A dangerous Burton backline meant that it was only 5 minutes before a well worked move and poor first up tackles saw the Legion carved open and Burton were in under the posts. With the easy conversion added, 7-0 was put up on the score board and it looked like the Legion could be in for a long day. This was further confirmed 5 minutes later as a speculative, looping pass from backrow/wing, Adam 'can't pass' Copsey was intercepted and despite a gallant effort from Smart, the Burton speedster could not be caught and dotted down for the second try in quick succession.

From the re-start, a solid chase from Henry Holmes resulted in the ball being knocked forward and a scrum being awarded deep in the Burton 22. With Jiminez still feeling the jetlag from his recent flight, he broke from the base of the scrum, making good ground before being dragged down short. Still trying to apply route one rugby, the Legion struggled to find a way through the rush/sometimes offside and not seen by the referee, defence. As they tried to work the short side, Captain, Kendall had a game of happy slap with the Lithuanian wrecking ball. With hands the size of Andre the Giant, it was a contest that Kendall soon regretted and he had to retreat to the bench, tail between his legs with a nasty poke in the eye.

There was time for one more Burton try before the half. Again, some poor tackling meant that they could dance around 3 or 4 would be tacklers to dot down for their third try and with that, left the half time score as a rather deflating, 19-0 to Burton. With Thomas now having to regularly assume the role of Coach, Manager, Physio, Waterboy, Time Keeper, Henry Holmes's personal minder and even having to employ grounds man, Neil Furniss to run touch, it was hard to focus on what was

needed at half time to rectify the situation. With no subs to make and Smart and Keary both having to withdraw from the field, the Legion were rather embarrassingly forced to briefly play with 13 players until Kendall was enticed back onto the field with the promise of Merlot and Keary gallantly popped his elbow back into the right place and re-entered the field.

Crow was bought closer in at 9 and MacKenzie moved to 10 to cover Keary's injury and with Crow jinking and swerving more than Wayne Rooney behind the wheel of a car, the Legion soon found themselves on the front foot with a new energy that had as yet, been unseen in the game. Leading from the front, Crow and MacKenzie started an attack from deep within their own half that released Gnosall stalwart, Riley to outpace the defenders and score in the corner. A brilliant kick from MacKenzie put the score at 7-19.

Shortly after, the Legion looked certain to score once again through Simon Price but as he puts it 'the fastest winger in the world' managed to cover him and instead of making his usual 'Hard Yards' he made some incremental inches before being dragged down by the roadrunner of a winger.

Burton were somewhat on the ropes as they began to tire and with Gribble clearly on top of the Burton 6, the lad, clearly still furious at what someone had obviously done to his hair as a bet, begged his bench to take him off with a suspect injury to save him further punishment from the rampaging Gribble. The request was denied by the Burton bench and Brazendale then also decided to pick on Goldylocks as he leaped far above him to take a high ball, only to come crashing down on that perfectly pineapple shaped haircut.

It seemed it was too little too late for the Legion as Burton managed to hold on for the remaining minutes, bringing the Legion's impressive run of victories to an end. Depleted numbers did not help, but a flat first half gave Burton the advantage that they took and held onto.

Next week sees Birmingham Bees travel to the Old Showground for a league/cup double header in which the Legion will be keen to right the wrongs and get back to winning ways.

Viva La Legion

TEAM:

L.Kendall(C), E.Moysey, C.Upsher, H.Holmes, C.Campbell, G.Gribble, A.Brazendale, J.Jiminez,

S,MacKenzie, J.Keary, S.Price, N.Smart, T.Riley, A.Copsey

BENCH: J.Jones

BENCH WARMERS: M.Lowbridge, J.Stiles, M.Woodhouse

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