

Midlands Premier Division

Newport 55pts v Lichfield 22pts

Newport clocked up their eighth win on the bounce whilst passing the 50 point mark for the eleventh time this season yet it was still not enough to secure second place with Peterborough Lions disposing of Bridgnorth to gain a deserved play-off spot where they will face Hull this coming Saturday.

Lichfield arrived at Forton Road knowing they would be playing at this level next year having secured their own safety with recent wins over their two closest rivals, Longton and Newbold, both of whom will now drop down to Midlands1 along with Old Halesonians whose own demise was sealed several weeks previously.

With two games still to play after this and grounds hardening by the hour Newport chose to rotate their squad and give everyone game time whilst spreading the workload. Charlie Hill returned at tight head, Jon Evans at loose whilst the injured Kirk Robinson was replaced at eight by Oli Buckley freeing up a place on the flank for Chris Campbell to come in for what turned out to be an impressive debut.

Newport were soon into their stride and after an early opportunity that was lost due to a knock on Monty Maule then put in a perfectly weighted chip through the visiting defence for winger Sam Hughes to race through and make the opening score after just two minutes. The lead was short lived, Lichfield taking advantage of a number of penalties along the left hand touchline that eventually resulted in a catch and drive try to tie things up at 5-5 after six minutes.

Newport then carried well out of defence and kept the phases going before Hill burst through and popped the perfect pass to the supporting Buckley who dotted down under the posts giving Liam Holder an easy conversion and a 12-5 score-line.

Both sides were attacking freely in the sunshine but when a Lichfield move broke up in the Newport half Holder launched a booming clearance to within ten metres of the Lichfield line. Newport were able to steal at the line and kept the possession and phases going before Hill crashed over, Holder converting once more to stretch the lead to 19-5.

There was then some good tight driving play with Hill involved twice, Buckley and Henry Vaka before the latter put Will Roach in for the bonus point try and with no news yet from Peterborough a play-off spot still looking very much "on". Lichfield hit back, again down the left hand touchline but were perhaps a little lucky when their own "overthrown" line out bounced kindly to get them in for their second try, converted to make it 26-12, only to add another just before the break bringing the half to a close at 26-17.

There were no signs of nerves in the Newport ranks as they continued to play with confidence and flair. Nathan Parker was on the rampage right from the start of the second period, an inside pass putting Jack Price in, Holder converting for 33-17. Price, Evans and Cowell were each producing some useful turnover ball in the tackle and the lithesome Campbell was enjoying his first opportunity in the team doing his fair share of the tackling and proving useful at the line outs.

Newport added another with Connor Adams frequently in the line from full back and distributing well to his support runners who were picking the right lines, Billy Wara the first beneficiary as he went in at the corner for 38-17 closely followed by another when Price turned it over on his own twenty two, ball moved right and Wara coasted in again with the minimum amount of effort from seventy five metres out, conversion good and 45-17 on the board.

Vaka then crossed for a trademark try before Lichfield broke from their own half through some lazy Newport tackling to register their fourth try to pick up a bonus point and a more respectable looking score of 50-22 before another good Roach drive saw Adams feed Vaka for the final try of the game that brought play to a close at 55-22

News then came through that Peterborough had accounted for Bridgnorth and picked up the necessary bonus point that would make it impossible for Newport to overhaul them despite their game in hand which comes next Saturday when they visit champions Birmingham & Solihull for the final fixture of their League programme.

Team: Adams, Holder, Perry, Vaka, Hughes, Maule, Brown, Buckley, Price, Campbell, Parker, Roach, Hill, Cowell (Captain), Evans
Bench: Wells, Morgan, Wara

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