

Peterborough Lions 22 Newport (Salop) 3

Newport's consecutive promotion dreams haven't quite been extinguished yet, but they will now need the help of others, after being on the wrong end of a 22-3 scoreline on Saturday.

They can have no complaints about the result. Anyone who plays, coaches or watches rugby, knows that you can't play rugby without the ball and you cannot tackle for eighty minutes without tiring. Peterborough, with their half backs playing faultlessly and their forwards looking after the ball like their lives depended upon it, starved Newport of any meaningful possession for long periods of the game. It would be hard to question Newport's effort, every one of the eighteen put in a manful shift, but ultimately the better team triumphed and sometimes you just have to take it on the chin and use it as part of the learning process.

Late cry offs had forced Bob Adams to name three forwards on the bench. Oli Buckley returned to the second row, with Rhys Morgan, Will Roach and Mike Venn starting in the back row. Light rain was falling as the game kicked off and it was immediately apparent, as you would expect in a game between two promotion hopefuls, that no quarter was going to be easily given. The entire first twenty minutes was played in the Newport half, but for all of Peterborough's dominance, all they had to show for it, was one successful penalty. Newport were dishing out one bone-crunching tackle after another and pleasingly the set scrum was vastly improved from the one that struggled last time out, but actually getting their hands on the ball was proving to be hugely frustrating.

As the half wore on Newport finally began to probe the home sides defence. On 26 minutes a scrum, taken against the head, with a mighty eight man shove, led to a well-executed attack and a forced transgression at the breakdown. Liam Holder slotted home the resultant penalty kick with a little help from the left upright to level the scores at 3-3. Still the possession stakes were in Peterborough's favour, but when Newport did get an opportunity the forwards and backs to a man, carried the ball with purpose, power and no little aggression. Both Tom Cowell and Mike Venn displayed how effective they are at the breakdown, by poaching valuable ball and the all-important team discipline was upheld under the sternest of tests.

On the stroke of half time Newport had an opportunity to steal the lead, after the ball had been illegally knocked from Sam Brown's hands at the ruck, but the penalty attempt drifted wide. The half ended level and quite honestly, it had been tiring to even watch.

Only five minutes into the second period Morgan was forced from the field and replaced by Jack Price. Newport's defence was still standing firm and twice they repelled catch and drive attempts by Peterborough in text book fashion.

Eleven minutes in, Sam Hughes was finally released in space on the right wing and showed great footwork, but the attack was ultimately snuffed out.

Peterborough, it has to be said, defended well throughout the entire game.

The final quarter of the game was where the game was won and lost. It would be easy to say that the yellow card shown to Roach, after repeated team infringements, made all the difference. Without doubt, it did not help matters and fourteen points were shipped in his absence, but the damage had truthfully been done in the previous 65 minutes. Holes were beginning to appear and constant Peterborough pressure, with some relentless pick and drives resulted in two tries in quick succession.

With the scoreline at 17-3 and the clock running down, Newport began to chase the game and put all focus into attack. Unsurprisingly their defence faltered and a third try was conceded at the death.

Final score 22-3. Certainly not what was required or hoped for, but Peterborough are a quality outfit and they will prove to be a handful for any team at this level.

Newport can take solace in the team spirit and determination displayed under unrelenting pressure. Kirk Robinson, who came on in the closing stages of the first half, played his best rugby since early season at Scunthorpe and the entire set of forwards showed huge improvements at the lineout and the set scrum. The backs had little chance to showcase their attacking prowess, but opportunities will come.

The season is far from over yet, upsets can happen - both Doncaster and Sandbach came unstuck on Saturday. As the old saying goes 'It ain't over till the fat lady sings', or as is probably required in these crazy PC days 'It ain't over til the size-challenged, gender neutral person sings'!

Grass, Cowell (C), Evans, Buckley, Parker, Venn, Morgan, Roach, Brown, Maule,
Hughes, Vaka, Perry, Holder, Archer

Hill, Robinson, Price

Phil Gittus