

## Midlands Premier Division

Doncaster Phoenix 21pts

Newport (Salop) 54pts

Newport made the long trip north on Saturday to visit Doncaster Phoenix for the first time in the club's history. Their opponents, who were level transferred from North Premier at the beginning of this season, share a ground with Championship team, Doncaster Knights, and the stadium, playing surface and facilities are first class.

Having played the corresponding home fixture only two months previously, due to a weather influenced postponement, Newport had a fair inkling of the Doncaster's favoured style of play. Their squad is young, fit and adventurous and want to run the ball from all areas of the field and play a high tempo, expansive game. They did not disappoint.

Before the details let's skip to the end. Newport for the second week running amassed 54 points in a convincing win, a total made up of eight tries and seven conversions. They again shipped three tries. The necessary five points were gained. Unfortunately, Peterborough Lions also recorded a bonus point win at Bourneville and the table remains exactly the same, with Newport five points in arrears, with one game in hand.

Saturday's win was not as easy as the score line might indicate and during the first fifteen minutes Phoenix had over ninety percent possession and an overwhelming territorial advantage. On the odd occasion that Newport did get hold of the ball, poorly executed kicks, necessitated immediate defensive duties. A well worked counter attack from one such box kick, had allowed Leighton Hill to put Phoenix ahead in the thirteenth minute and thankfully, as in last weekend's home game against Derby, this did trigger a positive response from the Newport ranks.

Finally, with some ball to work with, some inroads were being made into home territory and a storming run by Will Roach, who for the second consecutive week, was in fine form all afternoon, carried him to the 22 metre line. Unfortunately, his off-load to the supporting Henry Vaka, was forward and the travelling faithful would have to wait a few minutes more for the scores to be levelled. Newport's first controlled passage of play, just as the game entered the second quarter, saw Kirk Robinson, another who has found a fine vein of form of late, charge into midfield. The ball was then swung left, where another hard, determined carry by Roach, supported by Mike Venn, allowed quickly recycled ball to be transferred to the open side, where there was a total mismatch in numbers. Chris Perry touched down and the reliable Liam Holder added the extras.

On 30 minutes, Jack Price, replaced Nathan Parker, after the latter had taken a knock to the head in a mistimed tackle. This enforced change saw Oli Buckley move to lock and Price add some much-required extra pace in the back row. Minutes later, fine hands from Buckley, released his second-row partner, Roach, who was proving to be a real handful for Phoenix. His thirty metre gain, forced a period of pressure under the posts and a pick and go from captain, Tom Cowell, saw him add the second try.

The weather being, for a pleasant change, ambient, Bob Adams decided to tactically rotate the bench and Jon Evans joined the fray, replacing Jack Wells. Newport's third and the all-important fourth tries, quickly followed. The first, an excellent counter attack, saw determined run by Perry, put Connor Adams under the posts and the latter touched down by Monty Maule, was created by a 40 metre sniping run by Sam Brown, well supported by the fresh legs of Evans.

At half-time, with a 28-7 lead, Newport were certainly in the ascendency, but in no way had they extinguished the passion and desire of the home team. We were informed after the game that several key players had been rested for a county game the following day. That may be so, but the lads who donned their shirts, did themselves, their coach and the club proud. Physically they could not match Newport, but they did not let that prevent them contributing to what was a very entertaining and, in my opinion, well refereed game. Only three minutes into the second period, their left wing showed a clean pair of heels to the would-be defensive line and the gap was narrowed to fourteen points.

With 50 minutes on the clock the irrepressible, Roach, was showing no sign of tiring and another 40 metre bullocking run saw him hauled down only five metres short. The recycled ball, via several pairs of hands, found its way to Sam Hughes on the right wing, where he was bundled into touch as Doncaster fought hard to repel the onslaught.

Within sixty seconds, Newport's growing dominance at the scrum allowed Robinson to take advantage and touch down from Number 8. Holder's only miss of the day, that's a return of thirteen successes from fifteen, over two Saturdays, left the score line at 33-14.

Toby Mann, after helping the RAF defeat the Army in midweek, replaced Hughes and the rotation policy was proving to be a wise decision, as Pheonix continued to attack at every opportunity, even when penned back on their own try line. Buckley, with an assist from Maule, the territorial advantage having been again gained by Roach, scored the sixth and the returning, Parker, soon made that seven, after fine pick and drive work by the forwards.

Doncaster's efforts were finally rewarded with a third try, before a frantic, action-packed, ending to the game, saw fully five minutes of attack and counter attack by both teams, with no stoppage whatsoever. With seconds remaining, Newport, now adopting their opponent's fearless style, attacked from their own 22. Mann, at full tilt, put Perry through a gap and he sprinted through before feeding Sam Brown on his inside who scored under the posts and drop-kicked the conversion of his own try, a score that not only signalled the end of the match but one that would take his team over the fifty-point marker for the tenth time this season.

All round, a sound performance, faced by a team who pose a different kind of challenge from those routinely encountered. Worthy of note was the amount of successful choke tackles leading to turnover ball. These efforts were often led by Monty Maule, displaying talents not often found in the armoury of a stand-off. Henry Vaka, after bagging four tries last time out, didn't add to his tally this weekend, but his cover tackling was superb and his attacking skill set allowed his teammates to consistently benefit. Jack Price showed that he is fully fit once again and his thirst for work and hard running will cause some selection headaches of the welcome kind as we approach the final few games. Jon Evans also displayed great work in support and made several turnovers at the breakdown.

Last word goes to Will Roach, who after terrorising the Doncaster team, was probably featuring in some very bad dreams on Saturday night.

Team: Grass, Cowell ©, Wells, Roach, Parker, Venn, Buckley, Robinson, Brown, Maule, Hughes, Vaka, Perry, Holder, Adams, Price, Evans, Mann

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