

## Midlands Premier Division

Newport                      43pts                      v                      Bournville                      26pts

Heading into the "business end" of the season it was Bournville who were the visitors to Forton Road last Saturday looking to avenge a 16-57 defeat back in November that saw the Shropshire side earn both league points and a place in the North Mids Cup Final as a result of that victory.

Bournville were severely depleted that day and were able to field a much stronger looking line-up for this latest encounter which saw both teams with much to play for, Newport still chasing that second spot and the visitors trying to ease themselves further away from the bottom three.

Will Roach had failed to recover from a hip injury picked up at Longton whilst Charlie Hill, having declared himself fit after a rib injury was then forced to pull out with a virus. Oli Buckley had recovered from his ankle knock and Rhys Morgan took a place on the bench after a lengthy lay-off.

Skipper Tom Cowell gave the visitors the advantage of the slope first half and when Bournville conceded a series of early penalties Newport were soon exerting some pressure and Buckley appeared to have scored wide-out but not to the satisfaction of referee Mr Hill who brought Newport back for a penalty advantage, Monty Maule slotting over the kick for an early 3-0 lead. Maule then made a break down the right hand touchline with Chris Perry, who was outstanding throughout, just failing to latch on to the inside pass that would have produced the first try of the afternoon.

Having withstood this early pressure Bournville got their hands on the ball and went through some good phases before creating space down the right and cross for the try, the conversion was good and the visitors led 3-7 after twelve minutes. Almost immediately from the re-start Bournville swept down field with some lovely inter-passing skills that brought them another converted try under the posts that stretched their advantage to 3-14.

The game was to change on thirty two minutes when a Bournville forward was dismissed for stamping and suddenly the gaps that had been thus far difficult to find suddenly start to open up but despite several chances Newport had to wait until the stroke of half-time before Nathan Parker crashed over in the corner to make it 8-14 at the interval.

Newport would now have the advantage of the slope and, of course, the extra man and they soon made it count. Liam Holder, made a great break before being hauled down just short and penalised for not releasing but the Bournville penalty to touch was missed and Henry Vaka made great inroads down the right before handing on to the impressive Jack Price who, in turn was able to feed the supporting Mike Venn for a second try for Newport that Maule converted to regain the lead at 15-14.

Kirk Robinson was having an excellent game carrying aggressively and gaining the hard yards to put Newport on the front foot. From one such foray Dave Archer weaved his way through several tackles before being tackled short, Bournville infringing at the resultant ruck that saw the yellow card brandished by Mr Hill and thus reducing the visitors further to thirteen. Newport took full advantage, penalty into the corner, catch and drive, Sam Brown sniping round the fringes to dot down, Maule again converting for 22-14.

Some good straight running then exploited the obvious space and Vaka strolled in down the right for the bonus point try, Maule again converting to open up a 29-14 advantage, Maule then dancing through the visiting defence almost immediately for a try of his own which he duly converted for a 36-14 score-line

Another mazy run from Maule saw him combine with Jordan Grass, Price and Rhys Morgan to set up a second converted try for Vaka to make it 43-14

There was still twenty minutes to go but with the game well won, Vaka, Cowell and Venn made way for Jon Evans, Morgan and Connor Adams to see out the game with Jack Wells who seems newly refreshed and motivated since his mid-season break taking over the hooking, line out throwing and pack leading role culminating in an outstanding eighty minutes.

In search of a four try bonus point it was Bournville who, perhaps, took control of this final quarter and Newport were tested to the full defensively. They coped well under this pressure before the visitors, throwing caution to the wind scored two excellent team tries with some fine support running from players who must have been tiring given their reduced numbers for a large part of the game.

Both teams can be happy with the result, Newport inching a point closer to Peterborough whilst the one bonus point for Bourns may prove crucial in the final reckoning when it comes to confirming exactly who will lose their place in the Midlands Premier Division.

Team: Holder, Archer, Perry, Vaka, Hughes, Maule, Brown, Robinson, Price, Buckley, Parker, Venn, Wells, Cowell (Captain) Grass  
Bench: Evans, Morgan, Adams

Newport have a week's rest before travelling the short distance to Bridgnorth on March 24<sup>th</sup> for what is sure to be another hard fought and closely contested affair.

Written by: Chris Wilde