

Midlands Premier Division

Newport 12pts v Nuneaton 17pts

Newport fell to their first home defeat since April 2016 and in so doing lost their unbeaten record at the start of the new Midlands Premier League season. The home crowd were left somewhat bemused by their showing having previously witnessed them brush aside all before them thus far in racking up a massive 235 points in just four pulsating victories.

Alas there was to be no repeat on this windy and rain swept afternoon at Forton Road as Nuneaton ran out worthy and deserved victors on the day. The visitors came with a simple game plan – line speed, tackle everything and play for territory and they executed to perfection whilst at the same time forcing Newport into a host of individual errors that would have had little difficulty filling up an Argos catalogue.

It was the same starting line up that had triumphed up at Scunthorpe the previous week apart from a re-shuffle in the backs where Jamie Robinson came in on the wing to replace the unavailable Tom Cummings.

Newport were given the benefit of wind and slope in the first half and they had Nuneaton pinned in their own twenty two for virtually the whole of the first quarter but a host of chances were missed through a series of handling errors, forcing the last pass and wrong decision making which only served to help the visitors to believe that they could keep the score down and turn the screw in the second half when they would have the elements in their favour. This wastefulness, with weather conditions worsening, would ultimately prove their undoing and cost them the match.

The breakthrough came eventually after twenty one minutes when Chris Perry took advantage of a number of good phases to scythe through and score with Liam Holder converting from wide out to give them a 7 – 0 advantage. Newport were then penalised at the scrum giving Nuns the chance to reduce the arrears but the penalty attempt was pulled wide.

A series of individual mistakes then allowed Nuneaton into the home twenty two for probably the first time which resulted in a catch and drive converted try that made it 7- 7. Just before the break Newport put a couple of penalties into the corner but, not for the first time, their execution let them down and they were unable to capitalise leaving it all square at the break.

The tone of the afternoon continued right from the re-start when the Nuneaton kick off was spilled forward and then picked up by a retreating Newport defender resulting in a straightforward penalty from in front that gave the visitors the lead for the first time at 7-10.

Their lead didn't last long though when Holder put a booming penalty to within fifteen yards of the Nuns line, the ball being won and put down the backs where Monty Maule put a neat chip in behind the defence and Jason Francis

won the race to touchdown in the corner and maintain his record of having crossed the line in all five games so far, Holder's conversion attempt striking the upright but Newport were back in front at 12-10.

Nun's didn't panic and continued to work for territory and after several phases released their backs, an incisive line break being shipped on to the support runner who had hit the line at a great angle to score a fine try, converted to make it 12-17.

There was around sixteen minutes left at this stage for Newport to respond and preserve their unbeaten start to the season but as the game progressed they became more frustrated and in the driving rain made yet more individual errors. Indeed the feeling had already crept in amongst the observers that they wouldn't score if they played till Christmas such was the stranglehold that the uncompromising Nuns defence had on the game. There was to be no recovery and Nuneaton held on for a valuable away victory 12-17.

A brief respite now from League action but a tasty encounter nevertheless when Newport travel to Bridgnorth next Saturday for the first round of the North Midlands Cup where a large crowd will surely gather to witness this clash of Shropshire's two premier clubs.

Team: Holder, Jamie Robinson, Perry, Vaka, Francis, Maule, Paterson, Robinson, Morgan, Venn, Roach, Goulson, Evans, Cowell (Captain) Grass
Bench: Wells, Buckley, Archer

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