

## Broadstreet 34 Newport (Salop) 49

After last weekend's chastening loss to Bridgnorth, a big reaction was required, if not demanded, in order that Newport get back on track and keep their promotion aspirations alive. Without doubt, that reaction was delivered this Saturday, in the form of a free scoring try bonanza, resulting in a first ever away triumph at Broadstreet.

It is often said that teams can benefit from a losing experience, and the Bridgnorth defeat, although tough to take on your own turf, in front of a bumper crowd, has definitely forced the entire management and playing staff to refocus. There has been a player-led commitment to strengthen the buy-in to the team culture, and a realisation, across the board, that in order to achieve anywhere like their full potential, the efforts and plans, so tirelessly worked at on Tuesdays and Thursdays, must be replicated on a Saturday afternoon. This re-evaluation and pledge of allegiance was evidenced by the attendance of unselected and injured players at Saturday's match and their willingness to assist and encourage those in the match-day squad, both during the warm up and throughout the game.

Several changes were made to the make-up of Newport's eighteen. Will Roach was moved to Number 8, meaning a start for Nathan Parker at lock, alongside Oli Buckley. With Rhys Morgan unavailable for 3 weeks and Jack Price carrying a slight knock, Chris Campbell was recalled to the back-row and in the three-quarters Grant Hallam started on the wing. On the bench were fit again Kirk Robinson, South African prop, Siphwokuhle (Bomba) Bakani and utility back / flanker, Huw Bevan.

On an excellent playing surface, with a chilly cross field breeze blowing, Broadstreet kicked off and were immediately in the ascendancy, with a second minute try and one excellent, Roach, turnover aside, possession of the ball for the entire first ten minutes.

Newport's defence stood firm though and they began to work their way into the game. Henry Vaka made a trade-mark powerful carry and Alex Haselock, an excellent clean out at the breakdown. Campbell, who had minutes before run an excellent line to make valuable yards, threw a long pass to unleash fly half,

Jake Leonard. His turn of pace and well balanced sidestepping run, through the heart of Broadstreet's defensive line, saw him scamper over to open Newport's account. In what was to be a faultless afternoon with the boot, he then converted his try and put Newport 7-5 ahead.

Leonard was soon back in the thick of the action, fielding a Broadstreet box kick and then splitting the defence wide open, with another scintillating break. His off-load to the supporting Craig Wilson, allowed him to release Hallam on the right wing and he pinned his ears back and outsprinted the covering defence, to not only cross the line, but also to dot down under the posts, making Leonards second conversion a formality.

Fourteen five to the good and Head Coach Bob Adam's wish that Newport take off the shackles and release the team's devastating attacking potential early, was coming true. This was no one sided affair though. Broadstreet are a very decent outfit, with several players who have plied their trade in the National leagues and they quickly responded with a second try of their own, as the game passed the midway point of the first half.

Newport were certainly sacrificing some of their defensive fortitude in order to play a more high tempo, attacking, all-court game, but it was a joy to see a reinvigorated effort, backed up with far more accuracy and patience, than has been witnessed in many weeks.

The lead was further stretched with a third try, from Buckley. Perfect timing between Tom Cowell, with his throw, and Henry Purchase and his lifters, saw him pluck the ball from the skies and the well organised, ensuing driving maul, gained the critical ten yards, to allow Buckley to force his way over the line.

There were a few minutes, as the half wore on, where Newport seemed to get ahead of themselves and go 'off-script' , with no-look passes and some risky attempts at keeping the ball alive, rather than taking the contact. This however was short-lived and the positives outweighed the negatives manyfold.

There was some fine, powerful, counter attacking runs from Ricky Bailey, who is quickly translating his rugby league skills, to the technicalities of Union. Buckley also made a great steal at a defensive lineout, an occurrence that has been a rarity this season and Roach, a player who invariably provides some go-

forward, displayed fine knowledge of the laws and discipline when tackled. He won the collision, released the ball, immediately got to his feet and regathered the ball ahead of the defensive players, before making further yards. Even the referee was nodding his approval!

Just before the break, Newport scored the bonus point fourth try, with Parker powering over from close range. The try had been created by Sam Brown, when he pounced on the loose ball, after his opposite number had fumbled at the base of the scrum. Newport were then camped on the Broadstreet line for fully 90 seconds, with attempt after attempt being repelled by some heroic tackling, before Parker crashed over.

At 28-10 to the good, that is how the half should have ended. Unfortunately Brown's clearance kick was sliced and then a penalty conceded. The resulting kick appeared to go out, touch-in-goal, but after consultation with the touch judge, the decision was for a Broadstreet lineout. There then followed some very sloppy defensive work, which resulted in a third try for Broadstreet and a half-time scoreline of 17-28.

The second half pretty much mirrored the first. For the first five or so minutes Broadstreet had total possession. Encouragingly, from then on, Newport dictated the pace of the game and were finding spaces all over the pitch. This resulted in three tries being scored and some fine attacking play. However, defence certainly had taken a backseat and three further tries were leaked. It made for an entertaining forty minutes, but I would wager there will be some work on D this coming week.

This is not to say there were not moments of committed defence and one such was a thundering effort by Parker, that not only pole-axed the ball carrier, but also forced the ball to be spilt forward. There was also another noteworthy, monster of a tackle by Bomba, late in the second half. His opposite number looked like he had run into a brick wall and did not regain his feet for some time.

Newport's first try of the half came through Bailey, in the sixth minute, after Roach had picked up from the base of the scrum and made his customary charge upfield. When he was slowed down by the would-be tacklers, he found

Bailey on his shoulder and at pace. He then outstripped the chasers over sixty metres and touched down under the posts.

As in the first half, there was a short period when things got very loose in attack, but fortunately sense prevailed and sanity was soon restored.

Throughout the half Robinson replaced the hard working Purchase, Bomba took over from Wilson and Vaka made way for Bevan, with Bailey moving to partner Perry in the midfield, and Hallam to the full-back berth.

The sixth try of the day saw Haselock the beneficiary of some fine work by some of the big men. Campbell stole the ball deep in the Newport 22 and counter attacked, before finding the supporting Robinson and Parker, who combined to release the wing to sprint home from thirty metres.

Newport's final try, after a period of sustained forward pressure saw Robinson, barge over and give Newport a 49-24 advantage, with only ten minutes to play. It's fair to say, that the collective foot was taken off the gas somewhat, and two of Broadstreet's second half scores, were conceded in these late minutes.

Broadstreet, for their part are to be commended. At no point did you ever get the feeling that they thought they were beaten and they continued to attack throughout the second period, despite having limited possession. Their centre Andrew Murray was dangerous all afternoon and scrum-half, Lewis Dodds, controlled his backline with authority.

What a difference a week makes. Newport were a team who looked like they were enjoying their rugby again, and for that, we can all be pleased. In a great team effort, mention should be made of Leonard, for his best showing in a Newport shirt. He is, remember, 18, and playing out of position, in the most pivotal position on the pitch. His lines of running, injections of pace and growing confidence are a boon for Newport. Amongst the forwards, Campbell had a fine afternoon. He isn't a powerful, brutish back-row, but reads the game very well and uses guile to make up for some lack of bulk. He is a great lineout option and a solid link man. Jack Wells, now almost a veteran, gets a pat on the back for a hard working full eighty, including a commendable tackle count.

With Sheffield maintaining their one hundred per cent home record and beating Scunthorpe, things have really tightened up at the top of the table.

Bridgnorth have taken first spot on points difference, after beating Nuneaton with a late penalty and Newport only sit one point behind the two pace setters, as mid-season fast approaches.

Next up are Burton, who despite being in the lower reaches of the table, put up a gutsy performance on Saturday, to only narrowly lose to Luctonians. As always they will be given every respect and we hope you can all recover from Friday night's festivities to come and support the team.

Team: Wells, Cowell (C), Wilson, Buckley, Parker, Campbell, Purchase, Roach, Brown, Leonard, Hallam, Vaka, Perry, Haselock, Bailey, Robinson, Bakeni, Bevan.