

## Newport (Salop) 13 Bridgnorth 20

Albert Einstein is widely credited with saying, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results." His phrase certainly holds true in respect of Newport's performances of late. If you want different results than what you are getting, you have to try different approaches and Newport need to improve their discipline and massively reduce the penalty count, eradicate the stupid high risk-low reward off-loads, cut-out the aimless kicks, increase their hunger and desire and generally sharpen up their act.

If they are to remain at the top end of the table and be in contention through the winter months, then they need to replicate their training field form on match days. Newport are far from a poor team, but to say they are not playing to their full potential, is a huge understatement.

It would be churlish to take anything away from Bridgnorth's fine away victory, which has seen them swap places with Newport and now occupy second place in the table, but Newport certainly played into their hands, with an ill thought out kick ahead and a risky off-load, directly leading to two of the visitor's three tries. The period at the commencement of the second half was indicative of the team's inability to stay on the right side of the match officials, with three penalties and a free kick conceded in less than five minutes. This not only resulted in a repeated loss of possession and territory, but also any opportunity to gain momentum.

Newport had selected the returning Will Roach at lock, with Nathan Parker moving to the bench. They also gave a debut to local lad and former St Helen's rugby league player, Ricky Bailey, who started at full-back. The sky was blue, the pitch in perfect condition and the crowd in excess of five hundred strong, as Newport kicked off, playing up the slope, but in an odd climatic twist, with the breeze.

The first twenty minutes were all about Bridgnorth's dominance of both possession and territory and Newport's determined and steely defence. Newport's scrum was under pressure from the outset and to be fair had a torrid time all afternoon, but in open play the defensive structure was solid and

held firm. Rhys Morgan had an early dash down the left flank, after a Chris Perry charge down and Henry Vaka was stopped just short after a period of pick and go phases. Jake Leonard also impressed with some fine textbook tackling and one particularly well executed cross-field nudge, that gained fully forty metres.

Newport did start to see more of the ball as the game wore on, but without doubt the team in all black were in the ascendency. That said, it was not until the thirty fifth minute, that the man on the scoreboard had to be called into action, after Bridgnorth's Llew Williams, had slotted a simple penalty, awarded for a high tackle infringement. This loss of parity seemed to galvanise Newport and the closing minutes of the half belonged to them. There followed a period of great forward pressure, with Roach to the fore, after some inspired handling by Alex Haselock. On forty minutes a penalty was kicked to touch, allowing Oli Buckley to be lofted high and an immediate driving maul to be set up. Tom Cowell, in possession and steering from the rear was able to direct the effort over the line to register his sixth try of the season, a fine return for a front row forward.

As soon as the referee had signalled the score there followed a bit of an old school dust up, with a player from each team being issued a red card by referee, Matthew Astle. Ironically, Callum Madden of Bridgnorth and our own Rhys Morgan, are formerly teammates at Wolverhampton and are still good friends, despite the momentary loss of control.

With the difficult conversion attempt being unsuccessful, the half ended with the game finely poised at 5-3, in favour of Newport.

Despite repeated instructions to maintain a high standard of discipline Newport immediately fell foul of Mr. Astle and it was fortunate that two early attempts, from Bridgnorth's Williams, failed to dissect the posts.

Self inflicted pressure was taken to a further level when Perry was shown a yellow for a tip tackle. It seemed a harsh call and was only the second yellow Perry has ever received, however there are no complaints regarding the match official, who I think had a decent afternoon.

On fourteen minutes, Newport surrendered the lead, after their creaking scrum was again in reverse and Bridgnorth's scrum-half, Gareth Bladen, darted over from close range.

Midway through the half Jordan Grass replaced Craig Wilson in the front row and Nathan Parker took over from Roach in the second row.

The scores were soon level following a routine Leonard penalty, but this was to signal the start of another period of Bridgnorth superiority, which gleaned two quick tries and allowed them to build up, what was to be a match winning lead. The first was an unconverted pushover try. All credit to the Bridgnorth eight, who are by some distance, the best we have faced this season at the set scrummage. The second, this time converted, was a fine counter attack, after Toby Mann's attempted pass had gone astray and been scooped up by Number 8, Molitika Haloti.

Now into the last ten minutes Newport trailed by twelve points and with the game all but lost, took off the shackles and played their best attacking rugby of the afternoon. On thirty four minutes, a catch and drive led to the ball being spun wide in a training field move and into the hands of Grant Hallam, who had only minutes before replaced Leonard. He sprinted over to reduce the deficit and although the conversion was unsuccessful, Newport were back within a score of an unlikely draw.

Alas, it was not to be and Newport had to settle for a losing bonus point and the tough reality they had been second best on the day. Bridgnorth, with a superior set piece and a more belief and hunger, had done a number on Newport, who will have to wait until early March to avenge this loss at the Edgar Davis Ground.

Despite this somewhat gloomy report, Newport still remain a squad brimming with talent and promise. Buckley had his best game this season, Leonard is growing into the stand-off role and Morgan, as always, was a threat with ball in hand and one hopes that the panel will be realistic, when they review the incident that led to his dismissal. Without the ball for long periods, there was limited opportunity for Bailey to shine, but there were a couple of occasions when he was able to display his turn of pace and ball carrying strength and that augurs well for the future.

The fact that Newport sit in third place, only five points adrift of leaders, Scunthorpe, having by their own full admission, only played to 60-70 per cent of potential, so far this season, gives us much to look forward to.

The issues that are causing Newport problems are in the main part not physical, tactical, or technical, they are matters that can be solved using the "top two inches" .....discipline, patience and desire.

We look forward to a big reaction, in what promises to be another tough encounter, away at former National 2 team, Broadstreet.

Team: Wells, Cowell (C), Wilson, Buckley, Roach, Purchase, Price, Morgan, Brown, Leonard, Mann, Vaka, Perry, Haselock, Bailey, Hallam, Parker, Grass