

“Get your tights off for the lads”



By Leipziger
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We should have sang that in honour of the thermally-challenged Montauban replacement, but we didn't. Still, it wasn't the strangest sight of the evening – after a scrappy first half the Falcons actually came out fighting after the break and pulled away from the French side, who had threatened an upset despite apparently resting some first choice players.

Two drop goals gave the visitors a 3-6 lead at half-time in a game that did not look like it would produce many tries, but Newcastle dominated the third quarter to put the game beyond doubt and continue our encouraging start in the Challenge Cup.

Any doubts over the management's intentions for this game were dispelled by a strong team selection showing only three initial changes from the starting XV at Gloucester, with Micky Young, Will Welch and Alex Tait coming into the lineup, although Laurence Ovens took the place of Jon Golding just before kick-off.

Montauban immediately showed their intention to use their forward power by piling men into rucks, and full-back Johan Dalla Riva knocked over an early drop goal, but Jimmy Gopperth equalised with a penalty. The cold was biting amongst the 3,000-odd people at Kingston Park and no doubt with the players too, and there were few scoring chances in the first half Gopperth spraying the ball around our back-line and good breaks from Tom Biggs and Tim Swinson.

Montauban went into the dressing room ahead though thanks to Cédric Coll's drop-goal, and when the clock reached 40 minutes, Micky Young kicked the ball dead and sped for the tunnel. Whether he was cold or frustrated I don't know, but it had not been a great first half as we have seen more often than not this season.

In the second half the Falcons dominated and spent a lot of time in the away 22, with Gopperth dropping a crucial pass and Young going over only for the referee to blow for a knock-on. Montauban's discipline should be praised as they gave away few penalties and the Falcons struggled to find gaps in the defence.

Josh Afu almost set up Gcobani Bobo with a low kick onto the right wing but a defender kicked dead, but although the try wasn't coming, at least Gopperth equalised with another penalty.

Finally, Alex Tait burst towards the line and dragged a defender over with him to score the only try of the evening on the left, and though the conversion went wide, with Montauban then missing a penalty the game was now under black control.

Andrew Henderson's yellow card for a high tackle on Young didn't help the French cause and two further penalties sealed the result.

With no chance of a try bonus point but the win secured, in the last few minutes thoughts turned to preventing Montauban stealing a bonus point of their own as they spent the last phase of the game trying to get over the Falcons' line, but the defence held firm and ensured a satisfactory evening's work.

The 17-6 win leaves us four points clear of Montauban at the top of our pool, with a good chance of a home quarter-final still although that will depend on how we do in our two trips to France, starting in Montauban next Friday. After a disappointing first half, anybody knowing how we can get the team to play well and dominate in both halves of a game could make a mint at KP, but at least we are back to positive results.

And being me I want to end positively – I think yesterday was the best I've seen Bobo play for us. Not perfect, but he was strong in defence and showed some good running and linking with the ball. Hopefully his confidence will improve and we will now see the player that got into the South Africa team.