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Tom May inspires Newcastle to upset odds

Newcastle Falcons 14 Leicester 10

David Smith

Newcastle Falcons, who had been languishing third from bottom in the Guinness Premiership, turned in an inspired performance to shock Leicester, the league leaders, at Kingston Park last night.

The recent results of both sides coming into the game were roughly equivalent. Leicester had won five on the bounce and Newcastle had enjoyed a winning streak of six games before losing to Bath last time out. But Newcastle dominated almost the whole game, with Tom May, the stand-in fly half, the outstanding performer. They jumped three places in the table to seventh.

Steve Bates, the Newcastle director of rugby, called his side's display "our best performance of the season". He added: "We played a lot of good rugby, especially in the first half, and we were uncompromising in defence. We were nervous about Leicester before the game, but we managed to subdue them."

Newcastle were unrecognisable from this season's earlier incarnation, who managed only two wins from their first 11 games. They dominated the first half through intelligent kicking into space and intensely competitive play at the breakdown.



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Leicester became uncharacteristically edgy and error-strewn. A series of mistakes from Geordan Murphy typified their plight. "We made some fundamental errors," Richard Cockerill, the Leicester coach, said.

"I can't fault my side for effort, but there was too much sloppy play."

Newcastle's resurgence was most evident in their fluent back play. Earlier in the season, they were staccato, but here the fluent movement in the backs that led to Tane Tu'ipulotu's opening score was a joy to watch.

Another key to Newcastle's improvement was May, the man of the match. His kicking for possession far outdid that of his opposite number, Toby Flood. Towards the end of the first half, he landed a penalty from 45 metres that wobbled on to the crossbar then fell over, and a dropped goal from the same distance. A further conversion