My Lions XV

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Having had some fun earlier in the season, now is the time for proper cogitation on the Lions. Based on the 6N and assuming that rehab programmes work out as forecast, here’s my test XV.

15 – 1/2p. Nailed on to start and rightly so. 1st choice place-kicker to boot. Moving the Welsh maestro to the wing to accommodate Hogg was an option but the ease with which Fofana brushed past the Glasgae flier has relegated him to the dirt-trackers.

14 – Tommy Bowe. If he can prove his fitness, he remains the best. If not, then Cuthbert has nudged ahead of Gilroy as the front-runner.

13 – BOD (c). If Tuilagi had 1/10th the vision and footballing ability of the great man he would be a contender. I’ve always had my doubts and the Samoan was kind enough to highlight all of his shortcomings for me in the Cardiff show-down. JJV, despite an alarming dip in form, would be my back-up.

12 – Jamie Roberts. A return to something close to his best has me wanting to see Roberts reprise his partnership with O’Driscoll from 4 years ago. Very few decent alternatives so, due to the requirement to score tries against the convicts, Luke Marshall could make the squad if he regains consciousness in time.

11 – George North. Some way off his potential but still scary enough to get the gig. Visser would be in with a shout if his tackling were better than Chris Ashton’s.

10 – Sexton. We need to start praying to the patron saint of physios. Farrell and Madigan (controversial!) as understudies.

9 – Mike Phillips. Hurts to write it but he’s miles ahead. Due to English ineptitude, Connor Murray has gone from nowhere to No 2.

1 – Church. His 20 minutes of insanity were costly for Ireland but he remains the standout loosehead in the tournament despite a strong challenge from Ryan Grant.

2 – Rory Best. Very tight between him and Hibberd. Rory gets it because I’m biased.

3 – Adam Jones. By some distance the easiest selection, which puts him on the shortlist for captain.

4 – Evans. In a straight shoot out with Launchbury won by a knockout.

5 – O’Connell. If he can get through a number of games for Munster he must play. If not, then Parling.

6 – Sean O’Brien. There’s a really good case to be made for Warburton and I (and surely everyone else) wish that Fez were fit. But O’Brien’s work rate, physicality and go forward put him out in front.

7 – Tipuric. Tipped by everyone except the Welsh coaching team at the start of the season he has now put an end to any discussion about this position with a virtuoso display in the title decider. Hard to believe now that people thought Robshaw was an option.

8 – Faletau. Way off his best but not by as far as Heaslip is. Wood and Beattie have been good but not quite good enough.