

GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECHO

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**GLOUCESTER ALLOW NEWCASTLE TO HIT BACK
MIXED EMOTIONS AFTER A VICTORY CHANCE IS LOST**

AGAINST THE FALCONS

NEWCASTLE 27 GLOUCESTER 27

Three points gained or two points lost? There were plenty of mixed west country emotions freezing their extremities off in Newcastle yesterday.

Had Gloucester not given up the ghost in terms of ambition and creativity for 35 second-half minutes by kicking away so much possession it bordered on the criminal, they would have surely completed a victory that looked a near formality at half-time.

Despite playing with greater authority and control than they usually do on trips to the North East, Gloucester still had to settle for a draw and three points, rather than the bonus point success that had their names plastered all over it at the midway point.

Their generosity in returning an avalanche of usable second-half ball to Dave Walder, operating with maximum effectiveness in the stand-off role in place of the hopelessly outclassed Mark Wilkinson, allowed Newcastle to wake from their slumber and threaten an unlikely victory.

Walder's quality suggests he has a future in the number 10 position and his distribution subtleties allowed the hugely threatening footballing skills of Mathew Tait and the barn-door approach of Mark Mayerhoffer to ask more midfield questions of Gloucester in the space of 20 minutes than they had done in the rest of the match.

Tait's brilliant wriggling run and chip allowed Michael Stephenson to hack on further and beat Jon Goodridge to the score that eventually kick-started the recovery process in the 61st minute, after Newcastle disappeared up their rear-ends in the first period to trail 22-6.

Tait, regarded good enough by England barely a month ago to make an ill-advised debut in the furnace like surroundings of Cardiff, only to be discarded by the Red Rose management team 80 harrowing minutes later, looked the part here and he cut a dash from Mayerhofler's border-line pass to skin the cover and race home for the Falcons' second try with 12 minutes remaining.

Gloucester faces went distinctly pale at this stage. Their forward monopoly, supplied by the quickly maturing Nick Wood, the always testy Adam Eustace and the sheer blue-collar work-rate of Adam Balding, ran aground against the fresh impetus of Semo Sititi, Phil Dowson and Ian Peel as Newcastle suddenly discovered some grit up front.

And when they did manufacture possession, an assortment of Cherry and White-shirted fighters hoofed it straight back to Newcastle so they could begin the attack process all over again.

With Walder controlling matters, the Falcons deserve huge credit for rallying as they did and when Mayerhofler hurtled through an alarming gap at a defensive ruck from Hall Charlton's lovely pass with five minutes to go, a sixteen point deficit had been turned into a five point lead with as many minutes remaining.

That Gloucester roused themselves for one last effort was due in no small measure to Balding's determination to attack from a line-out and Alex Brown's expert catch.

The hard heads up front got just enough go forward to send Luke Narraway to the bottom of the pile for an equalising try he thoroughly deserved.

Henry Paul could not swing in his conversion attempt, but Narraway's touchdown was Gloucester's fourth try and at least guaranteed them three points that may still not be enough to prevent more hair-dryer treatment from Dean Ryan.

“I think we regard it as two points lost,” he said without hesitation. “We are disappointed with the second half and wanted to sit on the fence and win 22-6. We didn't take responsibility and kicked possession away recklessly. It allowed Newcastle to hurl everything at us because we gave them so much ball back.”

In the first half Gloucester were sharp and threatening against a side who had spent the last week in intensive care following their public humiliation against Leicester when they lost 83-10.

The forwards got on top early – anchored the scrum and more, got stuck in at the line-out and contested plenty of the bare-knuckle stuff at the breakdown. Balding, Noel Curnier, Eustace and Co. got through plenty of work to establish the sort of platform Henry Paul thrives on.

With James Simpson-Daniel's electric two-step creating space for Terry Fanolua, Gloucester possessed attacking options all over the field. But it took a brilliant moment from Gomarsall to spark the scoring spree. Seti Kiole thundered into midfield from a scrum and with the move dying, the scrum-half weaved free, looked for support to his right but kept going until he reached the far right corner for a brilliant individual score that looked to be heading into a dead end.

And then it was Marcel Garvey's turn to shake his snake hips through Newcastle's defence after Paul and Fanolua had created the hole for a try four minutes later.

Newcastle were all over the place and after Paul had snapped over a drop-goal, Gloucester scored their third try. Balding and Narraway breathed life into a play from a line-out. Gomarsall fed Paul and Fanolua, operating close to the peak of his skills, high-kicked through the cover to score right on the whistle to establish a 22-6 lead.

That they could not close the match out will irk Gloucester for a considerable time but this was still a better performance than their last-gasp victory against Bath.

It establishes them in the top four and an automatic Heineken Cup place and will be a real boost for the Premiership run-in.

NEWCASTLE : D. Walder; T. May, M. Tait, M. Mayerhofler, M. Stephenson; M. Wilkinson (J. Shaw 40), J. Grindal (H. Charlton 61); J. Isaacson (I. Pell 40), A. Long (M. Thompson 18), M. Ward, L. Gross (G. Parling 71), C. Hamilton, M. McCarthy (S. Sititi 61), C. Harris, P. Dowson (capt.).

GLOUCESTER: J. Goodridge; M. Garvey, T. Fanolua, H. Paul, S. Kiole; D. McRae, A. Gomarsall (A. Page 78); C. Bezuidenhout (N. Wood 74), M. Davies, T. Sigley, A. Eustace (P. Buxton 67), A. Brown, J. Boer (capt.), A. Hazell (J. Forrester 76), A. Balding.

STAR MAN : Adam Eustace.

REFEREE : D. Rose (RFU).

ATTENDANCE : 6,333

FOUR MINUTES: Dave Walder penalty.
Newcastle 3, Gloucester 0.

22 MINUTES: Andy Gomarsall try.
Newcastle 3, Gloucester 5.

26 MINUTES: Marcel Garvey try. Henry Paul conversion.
Newcastle 3, Gloucester 12.

33 MINUTES: Walder penalty.
Newcastle 6, Gloucester 12.

34 MINUTES: Paul drop-goal.
Newcastle 6, Gloucester 15.

40 MINUTES: Terry Fanolua try. Paul conversion.
Newcastle 6, Gloucester 22

61 MINUTES: Michael Stephenson try. Walder conversion.
Newcastle 13, Gloucester 22.

68 MINUTES: Mathew Tait try, Walder conversion.
Newcastle 20, Gloucester 22.

75 MINUTES: Mark Mapletoft try. Walder conversion.
Newcastle 27, Gloucester 22.

77 MINUTES: Luke Narraway try.
Newcastle 27, Gloucester 27.

JC