

GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECHO

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TYKES BOOST BID AS GLOUCESTER IMplode

CHERRY AND WHITES SHOW AN ALARMING LACK OF CONFIDENCE

IN LEEDS LOSS

GLOUCESTER 15 LEEDS 33

As the tumbleweed drifted through the home dressing room, some of its inhabitants must have wished the demolition of the grandstand above them would start right there and then. Perhaps that way, the debacle of a performance they served up against Leeds would be buried for good.

This was not about the Tykes playing well. They did and they deserved the bonus point win that has given them a stronger lifeline towards Zurich Premiership safety.

But any Gloucester side on an average day would have stymied Leeds' tenacity. No way would they have been ridiculed, both in the set-piece and in their decision-making, to the extent that they were 15-0 down inside 25 minutes and hardly hinting at a recovery.

James Forrester's compelling celebration of his equally riveting try on the stroke of half-time hauled out a hint of optimism and there were moments in the second half when they seemed destined to cross the whitewash, only to spill the ball and make life harder for themselves.

And even when replacement prop Nick Wood touched down Gloucester's second try off a determined rolling maul in the 81st minute, the muted salutations were overshadowed by the sight of a wincing Forrester clutching his wrist and making another premature exit from proceedings.

The pressure had been on the number eight to show his colours, as it had been on James Simpson-Daniel, McRae and the pack to lead the likes of scrum-half Alex Page and centre Mark Foster, the 21-year-old rookie called up for his first start after Terry Fanolua's back went.

But there were too many self-doubters in the ranks and a little too much nerviness to pull off the performance required by Nigel Melville and Dean Ryan.

"We don't seem to have that much confidence to ride storms when things are going badly for us," Ryan said. "Leeds scored a lot of points, the same as Northampton scored early points against us and we were forced to chase. A lot of that probably stemmed from our lack of control at the set-piece in the first 20 minutes.

"There are still new combinations, but that's no excuse. It's poor standards and we've got to be better at it.

"It's pretty obvious we lacked some confidence and when things don't go well for us, we get put on the back foot and that increases the lack of confidence – and when you're 15-0 down, it changes the nature of the game considerably."

Leeds played very simple, possession rugby. It was a plan that was executed comprehensively and, when they extended the boundaries with a little trickery after the interval and came up against Gloucester's best spell of the match, the Tykes reverted to form and waited for the mistakes to come.

Iain Balshaw appeared to have run his finger down the Gloucester team-sheet and picked his targets, notably Marcel Garvey. Only a couple of minutes had passed when the full-back handed out the first test for Garvey, with the Cherry and White winger striking the first dab when he cut Balshaw down and denied a scoring pass out to Diego Albanese.

But the worryingly sloppy line-outs had already started to rear up and any edge the forwards established in the scrum was wasted in the loose.

By contrast, the Leeds pack manoeuvred their way onto the score sheet with uninhibited mobility and ease.

Tom Palmer's bracing charge and some quick recycling through Alan Dickens sent Mike Shelley trotting over near the corner flag.

Gordon Ross slotted the conversion, then punished McRae when his Australian counterpart failed to release after racing forward from the restart by brushing over a penalty.

The comical errors that followed brought few smiles from either dug-out. Andre Snyman fumbled the restart on Leeds' five-metre line, but a scrappy scrum came to nothing and McRae could only find Jake Boer's face with his pass.

Gloucester permitted Leeds so much time on the ball and committed so much manpower to the tight, that the Tykes could not believe their luck. Foster's missed tackle on Chris Bell stretched the defence and the Leeds centre stepped over Page's desperate lunge to score in the corner.

When at last Simpson-Daniel was released, he rifled through Leeds' static flat line and sparked some life into his backs. But all Gloucester got for their efforts was a McRae penalty when Leeds strayed off-side.

When Jon Goodridge fumbled the restart, Richard Parks had two bites at the line, sauntering across from the five-metre scrum after he had been held up. Balshaw converted as Ross returned from being stitched up.

The delight of watching Forrester glide over off McRae's flighted pass got the blood flowing, but this was tempered as soon as Ross got his hands back on the ball after the interval.

The Scotsman chipped out, dummied McRae and chipped on for Jon Goodridge to clear first off. His next piece of aerial work caught Seti Kiole in two minds and gifted Leeds another three points.

During Adam Eustace's cool-off spell for tussling with Parks, Leeds managed a meagre Ross goal, albeit from 48 metres, with Balshaw skewing a drop-goal and Gloucester starting to defend.

Andy Gomarsall's arrival brought more fluidity to the recycling, but spills from Boer and Foster and Gloucester's inability to turn possession into points were heightened by Garvey's agonising break. Surging the long route towards the posts, he was beaten in the foot race by Balshaw.

Although the England back was thwarted by Boer's determination, Gloucester's flailing defence enabled Ross to shift play left for Leeds' second prop, Gavin Kerr, to sweep through the void and damage Gloucester's European aspirations further.

"I've said previous performances were unacceptable because of people's attitudes towards playing. I don't think that's the case now," Ryan added.

"When we're down to the bones, we're not a top three side by any means and we've just got to keep working through.

"Wherever we end up, we'll have to go and play, that could be in the Wildcard. But at the moment, we're just trying to find a little bit of stability."

GLOUCESTER: J. Goodridge; M. Garvey, J. Simpson-Daniel, M. Foster, S. Kiole; D. McRae, A. Page (A. Gomarsall 41); O. Azam (N. Wood 41), M. Davies, G. Powell (T. Sigley 69), A. Eustace, A. Brown, P. Buxton (L. Narraway 58), J. Boer (c), J. Forrester (J. Merriman 80+1).

Unused reps.: B. Davies, N. Mauger.

LEEDS TYKES: I. Balshaw (c); A. Snyman, P. Christophers, C. Bell, D. Albanese (T. Biggs 61); G. Ross, A. Dickens; M. Shelley, M. Regan (R. Rawlinson 72), G. Kerr, S. Hooper, T. Palmer, S. Morgan, R. Parks, A. Popham (D. Hyde 50).

Unused reps.: M. Holt, J. Dunbar, M. McMillan, C. McMullen.

REFEREE: T. SPREADBURY.

ATTENDANCE: 11,396.

STAR MAN: JAMES FORRESTER.

14th minute: Mike Shelley try. Gordon Ross conversion.
Gloucester 0, Leeds 7

19th minute: Ross penalty.
Gloucester 0, Leeds 10

25th minute: Chris Bell try. Ross misses conversion.
Gloucester 0, Leeds 15

34th minute: Duncan McRae penalty.
Gloucester 3, Leeds 15

36th minute: Richard Parks try. Ian Balshaw conversion.
Gloucester 3, Leeds 22

40th+1 minute: James Forrester try. McRae conversion – Half time.
Gloucester 10, Leeds 22

43rd minute: Ross penalty.
Gloucester 10, Leeds 25

46th minute: Adam Eustace sin-binned.

54th minute: Ross penalty.
Gloucester 10, Leeds 28

74th minute: Gavin Kerr try. Ross misses conversion.
Gloucester 10, Leeds 33

79th minute: Nick Wood try. McRae hits post with conversion.
Gloucester 15, Leeds 33

JC