

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2005

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If the object of the exercise was to rotate the squad, drip-feed in some youth and experience but maintain the winning habit, then Gloucester got it just about right.

A new batch of players got used to that feeling yesterday – Anthony Allen, Luke Narraway, Terry Fanolua and Mark Cornwell – to name the most significant four – who were given the opportunity by head coach Dean Ryan.

Gloucester simply had more wherewithal where it mattered, particularly up front in the scrum and in a superior power game that reduced Bristol's best efforts to their component parts.

The scrum was vastly dominant and even though the driving line-out was not up to the usual standards, there were impressive performances from Phil Vickery, Cornwell, Peter Buxton and James Simpson-Daniel.

“We talked in great detail about the fact this was a potential banana skin following our victory in the Premiership and we had to be very competitive to get the right result,” said Ryan. “We have worked hard on our defence and if you can get that part of your game right, you become hard to beat.

“We are far from the finished article but there are now 25 players in the squad who know what it is like to win and that is very important with what is to come.”

The game was over by half-time thanks to two Gloucester tries. The first came after eight minutes when Olivier Azam collected a wayward line-out throw from Saul Nelson and fed Cornwell on the burst.

From the ruck, Haydn Thomas linked with Mercier and Buxton was on hand to take his neat little pass to score by the posts.

Jason Strange reduced the deficit with a penalty but even against the wind, Gloucester were on top territorially to establish the sort of stranglehold Bristol could not shake off. Although the contest lacked the thudding intensity of the Premiership, Gloucester were neat enough to score again in first-half stoppage time.

Mercier had already nudged them ahead 13-6 with two penalties before a line-out drive got Thomas and Mercier in range and the stand-off's kick was brilliantly gathered by Simpson-Daniel who twisted and turned to score brilliantly under pressure.

At 20-6 to the good, Gloucester were virtually home and hosed. The quest now was for a bonus point and that required two more tries. The minimalist forward approach paid dividends after 47 minutes when another powerful surge by Buxton was carried on by Cornwell who crowned a solid performance with the third try.

Bristol simply couldn't live with Gloucester's extra grunt at the gristle end and although Bernardo Stortoni and David Lemi carried well, Bristol's one-out runners were easily swallowed by a hard-working Gloucester defence.

However, their fourth try did not arrive until the final quarter. Simpson-Daniel had lurked on the wing without much action all afternoon but when Fanolua picked another threatening line and off-loaded superbly to Narraway, Simpson-Daniel was given the chance to stretch his legs.

After shrugging off one tackle he burst past the cover to score behind the posts and complete the scoring.

He could and should have added a third in the closing stages that would have added the gloss to the victory but a fifth successive win keeps the run going.

“We have got to be pleased but we were at a similar situation last year so there is still plenty to do and plenty to work on,” Ryan said. “It’s back to the Premiership next week but we will go to Bath in good spirit.”

HT: 6 - 20

Attendance: 5,018

Referee: Sean Davey

JC