

# GLOUCESTER RUGBY

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2005**

GLOUCESTER SUFFER FIRST DEFEAT

BATH RUGBY 18 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 16

It would be very wrong to suggest Gloucester may never get the better of the demons that grip them every time they descend into the Georgian city, but for now, Bath can do no wrong against them at the Rec.

They secured one of the more remarkable victories of modern times on Saturday, coming as it did after they had played a large proportion of the second half with 13 men after the sending off of Andy Higgins and a yellow card for David Bory.

But their numerical disadvantage hardly seemed to matter as their tight forwards produced a performance of outstanding durability and power to set the foundation for a stunning home victory.

In Danny Grewcock, Steve Borthwick and Andy Beattie, they possessed three totems at the peak of their powers and although Gloucester slugged it out until the death, they conceded too many penalties that eventually proved crucial.

This defeat for the visitors will stick in the throat. The real damage was done in the third quarter when Olly Barkley punished any offence that referee Dave Pearson spotted at the breakdown and there were plenty.

It turned a 6-6 interval score into a 15-6 Bath advantage after Chris Malone had set the ball rolling with an outrageous drop-goal from inside his own half three minutes into the second period.

Barkley also had a wonderful match. His kicking was generally excellent and he offered a glimpse of his footballing qualities with a couple of slashing breaks.

The second half was one of the most memorable of the season in terms of its break-neck speed, element of risk and commitment that bordered on the hysterical.

Gloucester trailed to an 18th minute Barkley penalty before Ludovic Mercier kicked them 6-3 ahead with two kicks of his own after 22 and 28 minutes. By that time, Higgins had already spent 10 minutes in the cooler for a straight arm tackle on James Simpson-Daniel and he was to see red at the end of the half for tripping Mike Tindall.

The cat and mouse nature of the contest continued as Barkley levelled the scores when Peter Buxton was sinbinned for killing the ball.

With a man advantage, Gloucester were set favourably for the second half and although their line-out functioned superbly against one of the best defensive units in the Premiership, Grewcock and his chums started to carry ball to seriously good effect.

The nine point lead they established would prove crucial but Gloucester broke out with 10 minutes to go to score a brilliant try. Peter Richards fed Mercier from a scrum and Henry Paul's miss pass put Tindall up the centre. He cut back inside and found Rob Thirlby, who cut a devastating angle to beat the cover and score.

Mercier landed the conversion from tight on the touchline and Gloucester found themselves 16-15 ahead with time running out and within touching distance of their goal.

But their joy was not to last. When Pearson penalised them for off-side, Barkley landed his fifth successful penalty and handed Bath a two-point lead with two minutes remaining.

In the clutter and confusion, Gloucester launched attack after attack – using forwards and backs in a desperate attempt to force a penalty or another score. However, Bath's defence held firm and they closed out a victory that may be one of the most important of their season.

HT: 6 – 6

Attendance: 10,600

Referee: Dave Pearson

JC