

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2005

RYAN PRAISES CLINICAL PERFORMANCE

BAYONNE 10 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 26

Their victory over Bayonne was not always a thing of beauty. Indeed the torrential rain that lashed with unrelenting force throughout reduced Gloucester's effectiveness, but they were fully deserving of a morale boosting away win.

Any victory in France is worth celebrating and even without a raft of first team players because of injury, Dean Ryan's side were always in control of the match.

They scored three tries and could have had more. But the truly impressive nature of their performance was the cast-iron discipline and the work-rate of Peter Buxton, Andy Hazell, Adam Eustace and the rest of the forward pack.

Buxton was simply terrific. His power and thudding industry was at the heartbeat of the Kingsholm effort. Hazell caused no end of problems by invading space to make thoroughly damaging tackles, while Eustace controlled the line-out in the absence of Alex Brown.

One Hazell tackle on Pila Fifita will live long in the memory but Quinton Davids on his competitive debut added bulk to the scrum and Phil Vickery marshalled his troops well in an organised and determined performance.

"I thought it was an outstanding performance, one of the best this season," Ryan told <http://www.gloucesterrugby.co.uk/>. "It was the best shape we have had, we put Bayonne under great pressure and controlled the game.

"We work ever so hard – I thought Quinton Davids was outstanding, Peter Buxton had his best game of the season and it was just a very organised and committed performance.

"Any victory in France is good and we knew we would be under extreme pressure for 80 minutes – I am just delighted we have got back to winning ways and this is a great start for us."

Gloucester were up and running as early as the fourth minute when Ludovic Mercier banged over a penalty and it was not long before they had their first try. Hazell started the sequence by chasing down Haydn Thomas's kick and smashing Fifita into the middle of next week.

Bayonne were penalised for hands in the ruck and Mercier aimed for the corner. From the line-out, Davids took the catch and Hazell was driven over for the opening score.

Mercier kicked another penalty after 17 minutes and again after 31 to stretch Gloucester's lead to 14-3 after Henri-Pierre Vermis replied with three points for Bayonne.

But Gloucester were in control. The occasional line-out squirmed free in the rain but they drove with conviction and power and looked to set Mike Tindall and James Simpson-Daniel free in midfield. They also got their big men carrying possession and Bayonne had no real answer to their structure.

There were no more points before the interval but it took Gloucester just six second half minutes to score again. Mercier prodded a little roller behind Bayonne's defence and in the wet, the home side turned over possession on their one line. From the ruck, and with options left and right, Thomas snuck round the short side to score.

At 21-3 ahead, the contest was over and the pockets of Gloucester supporters danced their delight to the tune of a band that kept its tempo better than the home side. Although they had to wait until the last quarter for the third try, it was worth waiting for.

James Forrester was in the vanguard of a move that straightened an attack and Mark Foster came in off his wing, picked a lovely little angle and shrugged off four or five defenders on his way to the line.

Ryan had already made changes and when Jonathan Pendlebury was sinbinned in the last few minutes, Bayonne got the try they deserved when flanker and skipper Louis Massabeau was helped over from a line-out.

But not even a late try could detract from a job well done by Gloucester.

HT: 3–14

Attendance: 5,000

Referee: Donal Courtney

JC