

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2005

BATH PULL THE PLUG ON POWERGEN HOPES

BATH RUGBY 21 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 12

Despite a hugely impressive effort from the forwards against one of the meanest and moodiest packs in the business, Gloucester never recovered from conceding two sloppy tries within the space of seven first half minutes.

It left them chasing a game in conditions that were virtually impossible and helped Bath into the last four of the competition.

The infuriating thing for Gloucester will be the fact that Bath offered very little outside the tries they scored and after Olly Barkley, quite comfortably the most influential back in the first-half, failed to return after the break, the home side simply protected their lead.

Barkley was terrific in the midfield and the home side missed his touch and creativity.

Despite a few palpitations in the line-out, Gloucester made a much better fist of the forward exchanges than they had in the Guinness Premiership. They had a real go in the scrum - where Nick Wood produced an outstanding performance against Matt Stevens - and even got the shunt on in a series of driving mauls.

But what they couldn't do was make the most of their limited chances. The best came late in the second half when they had a line-out dragged down close to the line but Bath escaped and closed out the win.

Gloucester went ahead as early as the second minute when Ludovic Mercier landed a penalty after Alex Crockett was penalised for not rolling away at a ruck.

However, Bath were immediately on terms when Barkley slotted a penalty from the re-start after Gloucester were penalised for crossing.

The contest remained tight, tense and thoroughly full-on. Both packs slammed into each other in a stirring forward contest and Gloucester even survived intact when they lost full-back Olly Morgan to the sinbin for a high tackle on Matt Perry.

But at the end of the first quarter, disaster struck. Bath won a penalty in front of the sticks and Chris Malone shaped to have a free shot with a drop-goal. However, he nudged a delicate chip in behind Gloucester's defence and Barkley ran through to score.

Gloucester simply failed to cope with Bath's chip and chase game and after Barkley converted his own try to make it 10-3, the home side used the same tactic to outstanding effect again.

Scrum-half Nick Walshe chipped in behind James Bailey and Joe Maddock was able to control the sliding ball to score and establish a game-winning 15-3 lead after 26 minutes.

Gloucester chugged away and picked up a penalty by Mercier but were still 18-6 down by the break.

To Gloucester's great credit, they kept on churning forward. Through Phil Vickery, Peter Buxton, Adam Balding and Andy Hazell, the Kingsholm pack gave as good as they got in an attempt to establish some crucial field position.

Mercier cut the gap to 18-12 with two more penalties but Gloucester couldn't hold down an attacking platform long enough to make the pressure tell.

Bath were able to weather the storm and sealed the victory when Malone landed a late penalty to take the home side into the semi-finals after another full-on dose of west country tribalism.

HT: 18-9

Attendance: 8,563

Referee: Nigel Whitehouse

JC