

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2005

GLOUCESTER'S LATE BONUS

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 31 LEEDS TYKES 7

Gloucester struggled to turn their immediate superiority into an even greater victory in a contest that got lost in a fog of confusion at the tackle area and a general lack of shape and direction.

In the end they can be thankful to Simpson-Daniel's second finish of the afternoon two minutes from time for salvaging a try bonus point.

"As a spectacle, it was pretty dire in the second half," admitted Gloucester's head coach Dean Ryan. "I was glad we got the bonus point at the end but it probably came about 50 minutes too late for my liking.

"I thought we made a fantastic start and were really on song but then relaxed and waited for things to happen. That was disappointing."

Ludovic Mercier booted Gloucester into a fifth minute lead with a penalty and then extended their advantage with a first try 10 minutes later. They drove a series of line-outs to within touching distance of the line and when Peter Richards fired a ball right, Gordon Ross knocked on and was sinbinned before the referee awarded a penalty try.

Five minutes later, Gloucester were in again. Mike Tindall, Adam Balding, Phil Vickery and Jake Boer were all involved in a powerful attack and when play came back in front of the sticks Mercier gathered his own little chip to score via a deflection off a post.

His conversion took Gloucester 17-0 and with Rob Rawlinson also in the cooler, Leeds were down to 13 men.

However, Gloucester simply failed to make the most of their advantage. They didn't play enough football that would utilise the special talents of Simpson-Daniel and got bogged down a messy, scrappy fight at the contact area, despite huge efforts from Andy Hazell and Vickery.

When they did move possession, Gloucester carried a potent threat. Simpson-Daniel got the third try and his first when he slid home from short range after 26 minutes and there was a very real possibility they would register a bonus point before the break.

But the fourth try simply didn't happen. The line-out struggled and the game became something of a glorified team-run as Leeds had plenty of possession and Gloucester were forced into plenty of defence.

Leeds had long spells in possession and never gave up the challenge as Gloucester struggled to find an impetus to their game that would have stretched the lead further.

Indeed, it was the Tykes who scored next when Jordan Crane snuck home from close range following a messy series of forward drives after 65 minutes.

It was everything that Leeds deserved and it was not until the final moments of the contest that Gloucester grabbed their sacred score. Mercier prodded a little kick behind Leeds' flat defence and Simpson-Daniel ran into score.

But the victory moves Gloucester up to third in the Guinness Premiership ahead of their trip to Saracens next weekend.

HT: 24 - 0

Attendance: 11,529

Referee: Rob Debney

JC