

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, MARCH 25, 2006

BRISTOL STUN KINGSHOLM

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 15 BRISTOL RUGBY 20

It all looked so rosy for Gloucester when the returning James Simpson-Daniel scored after a minute, but as the conditions worsened, Bristol's no-nonsense attitude up front swung the contest in their favour and they were rewarded with their first Kingsholm win since 1994.

Gloucester are also suffering a major prop crisis, that could affect their European Challenge Cup clash against Brive next weekend. Already without Phil Vickery, Gary Powell and Nick Wood because of injury, they lost Patrice Collazo to a shoulder complaint in the first half and will lose Jack Forster to the England Under-19 World Championship next week.

And with Terry Sigley seeing red in the second half, head coach Dean Ryan is facing huge front row problems.

But that is to take nothing away from Bristol. With the contact area littered with bodies, they drove hard through and around the fringes, dominated the scrum and gave as good as they got in the line-out in a terrific effort.

With Mark Regan in full wind up mode and Matt Salter in remarkable form on the flank, Bristol dragged themselves forward with remarkable durability.

However, it looked as though Gloucester would get back to winning ways when they scored after a minute.

Mark Foster fielded a long kick and could have punted himself but instead linked with Jon Goodridge as Gloucester ran the ball back.

Once in behind the Bristol defence, Haydn Thomas found Collazo and Alex Brown as the home side streamed forward.

When possession was shifted right, Anthony Allen sent Simpson-Daniel home close to the sticks.

But Gloucester's superiority didn't last, despite the fact Ludovic Mercier made it 10-0 with a penalty. It is safe to say these two sides hardly get on, but Bristol dug their claws in and were competitiveness personified in close quarters and ground themselves back into the contest with a Jason Strange penalty after 24 minutes.

In truth, Gloucester could have had the game sewn up in the first-half but with inexperience throughout the side, Bristol's dogs of war bounced off the ropes and scored two tries in the second half.

They kept possession through a series of multi-phase forward attacks at the start of the second half and despite excellent Gloucester defence, Shaun Perry broke blind and scored in the far corner past James Bailey.

Strange then kicked a 62nd minute penalty to give Bristol a 10-13 lead and suddenly the realisation dawned that Bristol may have enough about them to win the game.

Gloucester raised themselves and after Sigley was red carded, the scrums went uncontested and, as a result, Luke Narray was introduced to spice things up. It was his break after 67 minutes that created space and Allen cut back on a lovely angle to score superbly to re-establish Gloucester's lead.

With a two point advantage, it looked as though Gloucester may save themselves but when Strange kicked cross-field with two minutes remaining, Brian Lima got behind Bailey, controlled the ball and picked up to score from 25 metres.

It was enough to break Gloucester hearts and leaves them in a real fight for a top four place.

HT: 10 - 3

Attendance: 11,517

Referee: Wayne Barnes

JC