

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, MAY 6, 2006

SUPERB GLOUCESTER LOSE OUT IN THRILLER

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 32 LONDON WASPS 37

In a contest that throbbed with drama and hummed with intensity, Gloucester's play-off dreams were ended by Wasps in one of the most outstanding games of the season.

The utter devastation Gloucester will feel at the defeat will be off-set by the knowledge that head coach Dean Ryan and his team are assembling one of the classiest and most talented squads this side of anywhere in the country.

Had Gloucester shown a shade more game management ability and a reliance on the basics, they would surely have won against one of the most resourceful teams in the business.

But in the twinkling feet and bewitching hands of Ryan Lamb, the wonderful running lines of Anthony Allen and the silky pace of James Simpson-Daniel, a packed Kingsholm was left drooling at their talents.

Lamb and Allen in particular shredded the Wasps defence at times and with Jack Forster standing up brilliantly well in the tight, Gloucester's youth brigade almost pulled off the greatest win of their season.

In the end, Joe Worsley's second try with five minutes remaining sealed Wasps' triumph and means they play Sale in the semi-final next week.

But Kingsholm was treated to an extraordinary contest. It took Gloucester eight minutes to open the scoring with a try crafted and finished by Allen. Jonathan Pendlebury's neat work at a line-out allowed Peter Richards and Lamb to find the centre and he picked a sizzling line to burst past the cover and score from 30 metres.

It was just the start of the feast. Wasps, who caused plenty of damage when they kept the ball tight and made yards through their big forwards, responded with a Mark van Gisbergen penalty as Gloucester attempted to play from too deep too early.

Van Gisbergen was in one of those moods and after a second penalty, set up Wasps' first try for Worsley. The full-back gathered a kick from Olly Morgan and sliced through the cover and although there was a large hint of obstruction, Wasps recycled the ball for Worsley to score to the right of the posts.

And it was van Gisbergen who made mincemeat of Gloucester's defence eight minutes before the break to slalom past the cover to score a memorable individual try and set up a 20-5 advantage.

Although Lamb nailed a penalty before the break, Gloucester were staring down the barrel – until the game shuddered into life in 20 crazy, wonderfully inventive minutes.

Two minutes after the break, Mefin Davies won a scrum against the head and James Forrester set off towards Wasps territory. Mark Foster and Andy Hazell came in to add weight to the move and when possession came back, Lamb nudged a lovely grubber in behind the defence for Allen to scoop up and score.

If that was good, the best was still to come. Gloucester turned Wasps over deep inside their own half and Lamb picked out Morgan, who somehow got his pass away to Simpson-Daniel in the tackle.

Swept along by an avalanche of noise, the winger bobbed and weaved into space before Haydn Thomas took over. With Wasps in retreat, Gloucester recycled and Lamb dummied his way through a thicket of men to score himself and send Kingsholm into orbit.

Gloucester led 22-20 and that became 25-20 with a Lamb penalty as Worsley was dispatched to the sinbin for a professional foul.

Wasps hit back and maintained possession superbly well in a series of powerful surges but when they coughed up possession, Gloucester hit them with a glorious sucker punch.

Foster won the ball and Lamb spotted Simpson-Daniel in acres of room on the far side. His long pass picked him out and Simpson-Daniel danced past Lawrence Dallaglio and Simon Shaw and over half-way.

Kingsholm lurched with the noise but with the cover converging, Simpson-Daniel sent James Bailey home past Paul Sackey for a sensational score.

Lamb's conversion sent Gloucester 32-20 ahead and within touching distance of the semi-finals but in the final, frantic quarter, they simply lost their way.

They had no field position to work from as Wasps cranked up the heat and they made plenty of errors as the pressure began to tell. But there was an element of fortune about the try that got Wasps back into the game.

Stuart Abbott appeared to be held in the tackle but was allowed to play on and Sackey, with hardly any room to work in, cut inside from 35 metres to score quite brilliantly.

And with time running out, Morgan failed to find touch and Worsley sealed Wasps' comeback with a powerful burst from the 22 metre line that broke Gloucester hearts.

HT: 8-20

Attendance: 12,500

Referee: Tony Spreadbury

Man of Match: Ryan Lamb