

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2006

OSPREYS STORM TO CUP VICTORY

OSPREYS 49 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 19

GAVIN HENSON scored 24 points as the Ospreys hit Gloucester for six at the Liberty Stadium.

Although Gloucester showed a team containing a raft of changes and a severe injury list, they were picked apart by the Ospreys with considerable comfort to get their EDF Energy Cup campaign off to the worst possible start with a 49-19 defeat

They were second best in the physical exchanges, despite the best efforts of Jake Boer, and once the Ospreys started to dominate those exchanges, it allowed Henson, the fabulous Sonny Parker and Justin Marshall to play off the back of it.

The hosts scored inside the opening two minutes and Gloucester never recovered – they never got over the shock of conceding so early and their only try came from scrum-half Pete Richards in the second half.

It had been a long week for the Ospreys. If the stories seeping out of the Welsh region could be believed, there had been no stone left unturned as they searched for answers following their Magners League defeat to Ulster last Friday that left coach Lyn Jones fuming.

And the way they started against Gloucester suggested they were prepared to run the disappointment out of their system – they were direct, powerful and showed plenty of ambition.

They scored two tries of differing qualities inside the first quarter and could have been out of sight in the first half had they not cut their own throats with any number of turn-overs and dropped passes, but some of their continuity work was wonderful.

Despite a right ding-dong in the scrum, where Gloucester won three penalties from their first four put-ins the men from Kingsholm struggled for meaningful possession and territory.

They were behind as early as the first minute. The Ospreys controlled a scrum, Justin Marshall got his backs away to the right where Duncan Jones fed Lee Byrne and the full-back put Shane Williams in at the corner.

Gloucester, with a host of new combinations, simply failed to gel. They roughed up the home scrummage but were generally conservative in their approach and only had two Ludovic Mercier penalties after 10 and 30 minutes to show for their huff and puff.

The Ospreys were sharper, driven on by Marshall and ticked over by the boot of Henson. He missed his first conversion but thereafter was spot on. Williams and Marshall were involved to keep a move sustained down the right and when Will James was penalised, hooker Barry Williams was driven over for the try to make it 12-3.

That became 12-6 and then 15-6 with a Henson penalty after 30 minutes. Gloucester then lost Mark Foster to the sinbin for preventing a quick line-out after yet another penetrating Ospreys attack.

From the offence, Henson collected another three points from the touchline and then extended the lead to 21-6 with a third penalty to virtually take Ospreys safe before the break. Although Mercier kicked a 41st minute penalty, the Ospreys scored twice in six minutes and Parker bagged them both.

There was simply more structure and fluidity to the Ospreys effort and after Andrew Bishop and Alun Wyn Jones had carved big holes into the Gloucester defence, Parker came up on the outside to score in the corner.

But his second was all of his own making. The home side had run hard all night and when Parker swooped on a loose clearance, he arched back around the blindside to score brilliantly and take the score to 35-19.

Gloucester then made a number of changes – introducing Pete Richards, Olivier Azam and Nick Wood and initially it had the desired effect.

They powered into midfield – using the physique of James and the silky running skills of Anthony Allen, who had an outstanding game. They managed to keep the ball long enough for Jake Boer to slam into the contact and Richards was able to pounce on the loose ball and score.

However, the score was merely cosmetic. The Ospreys just kept coming. Ian Evans' midfield run – he is a lock – ended when Marshall nipped up on his shoulder to score from 30 metres to score under the sticks to make it 42-19 and then Henson converted his own try after running flat across the face of Gloucester's defence before timing his fine twist and turn brilliantly.

Ospreys Team

15. Lee Byrne 14. Nikki Walker 13. Sonny Parker 12. Andrew Bishop
11. Shane Williams 10. Gavin Henson 9. Justin Marshall 1. Duncan
Jones 2. Barry Williams 3. Paul James 4. Brent Cockbain 5. Ian Evans
6. Alun Wyn Jones 7. Steve Tandy 8. Ryan Jones

16. Ed Shervington 17. Adam Jones 18. Lyndon Bateman 19. Jonathan
Thomas 20. Jason Spice 21. Shaun Connor 22. Tal Selley

Gloucester Rugby Team

15. Olly Morgan 14. James Bailey 13. Jack Adams 12. Anthony Allen
11. Mark Foster 10. Ludovic Mercier 9. Rory Lawson 1. Patrice Collazo
2. Mefin Davies 3. Jack Forster 4. Will James 5. Adam Eustace 6. Adam
Balding 7. Jake Boer 8. Luke Narraway

16. Olivier Azam 17. Nick Wood 18. Marco Bortolami 19. James
Merriman 20. Peter Richards 21. Brad Davies 22. Rob Thirlby

HT: 21 - 6

Attendance: 7,557

Referee: Hugh Watkins

JC