

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2006

BALSHAW'S TRY SEALS DERBY VICTORY

WORCESTER WARRIORS 24 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 33

GLOUCESTER got the better of a ferocious and utterly compelling tribal dispute against M5 rivals Worcester to climb to the top of the Guinness Premiership.

In a contest that had everything good about England's domestic league, Gloucester matched Worcester's three tries, their unrelenting enthusiasm and boundless physicality to continue their unbeaten start in the league.

The contest was red in both tooth and claw and although tries from Jack Adams, Anthony Allen, Iain Balshaw and 18 points from Ryan Lamb were the difference on the scoreboard, Gloucester had any number of foot soldiers to thank for chiselling out a mightily important victory.

"People are always talking about the three 20-year-olds we have in the backline but I thought the contributions made by Nick Wood, Christian Califano, Peter Buxton and Adam Eustace to single out only four individuals were outstanding," head coach Dean Ryan said.

"It was a massively physical game – probably one of hardest this season – but I thought we stood up tremendously well and the guys deserve a huge amount of credit for that because this was one of the toughest games we have had.

"I am delighted for all of them involved."

The crucial moment of the game came just before half-time when Gloucester were down to 13 men with Buxton and James Forrester in the sinbin for a collection of offences at the breakdown that stopped Worcester in their tracks.

The hosts revved up the heat in an all-out assault but in the efforts of Wood, outstanding at loose-head, hooker Mefin Davies, precise and calm as always and the squared off figure of Christian Califano, Gloucester survived a series of close range attacks to take a massive defensive lift.

When you throw in the power of Buxton and Adam Eustace and the more exotic talents of Forrester and Andy Hazell, Gloucester bit hard and hung on to allow Forrester to run and run in the second half.

It was a terrific result after proceedings got off to the worst possible start when Worcester scored a great try after 47 seconds.

Scrum-half Ryan Powell, who produced an eye-catching performance throughout, was involved twice in the move that led to Shane Drahm stepping away from the cover and over the line to lift the roof off Sixways.

But Gloucester struck back almost immediately. The spotlight has gazed unrelentingly on the likes of Allen, Adams and Ryan Lamb and initially Lamb struggled to settle and find his rhythm.

However, after Buxton had drawn in a line-out catch close to the line, Lamb came short, ran across the face of the sticks and sent Adams bustling into score with a flat pass to tie the scores at 7-7.

Although the score remained unchanged for almost 20 minutes, the intensity levels were enormous. Kia Horstmann carried plenty of ball and Pat Sanderson was always in the thick of the action as both teams traded blow after blow.

It was only when Buxton and Forrester departed to the sinbin that Worcester sensed a way through when Powell sustained a move down the right, Lee Best waded in with useful support and sent Dale Rasmussen to the line for their second try.

Lamb dragged Gloucester back to 14-10 adrift and then 14-13 with two penalties as both teams swapped a succession of penalties before Gloucester scored the try that finally created some breathing space.

Allen was initially involved alongside Forrester, who was able to swap passes with Pete Richards in heavy traffic. Mike Tindall, by now on for Adams, made a clattering charge down the right to suck in defenders and when Gloucester recycled, Allen appeared from nowhere on a lovely angled run to score.

Gloucester were now nine points to the good but Worcester roused themselves again. Drahm, heavily involved in everything good about the hosts, kept them ticking before nudging a lovely little kick in behind the Gloucester defence that bounced past Balshaw and Thomas Lombard slid home to score via the video referee.

If there were a few anxious faces on the Gloucester bench it didn't show. With five minutes remaining, Wood, Davies and Carlos Nieto got the run on the right side of the Worcester scrum to set Forrester galloping away and with Rory Lawson in support, he gave the scoring pass to Balshaw to seal Gloucester's victory and top spot in the table.

Worcester Team

15. Lee Best 14. Aisea Havili Kaufusi 13. Dale Rasmussen 12. Thomas Lombard 11. Mark Tucker 10. Shane Drahm 9. Ryan Powell 1. Lee Fortey 2. Aleki Lutui 3. Chris Horsman 4. Richard Blaze 5. Phil Murphy 6. Pat Sanderson 7. Tom Harding 8. Kai Horstmann

16. Darren Morris 17. Ben Gotting 18. Drew Hickey 19. Gavin Quinnell 20. Matt Powell 21. James Brown 22. Thinus Delpont

Gloucester Rugby Team

15. Iain Balshaw 14. James Bailey 13. Jack Adams 12. Anthony Allen 11. Mark Foster 10. Ryan Lamb 9. Peter Richards 1. Nick Wood 2. Mefin Davies 3. Christian Califano 4. Will James 5. Adam Eustace 6. Peter Buxton 7. Andy Hazell 8. James Forrester

16. Olivier Azam 17. Carlos Nieto 18. Jonathan Pendlebury 19. Jake Boer 20. Rory Lawson 21. Ludovic Mercier 22. Mike Tindall

HT: 14 - 10

Attendance: 10,197

Referee: Dave Pearson

JC