

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2006

LEINSTER'S CLASS TELLS IN DUBLIN

LEINSTER 37 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 20

GLOUCESTER'S Heineken Cup odyssey hit the skids against Leinster's international glitterati at Lansdowne Road – but the men from Kingsholm showed more than enough promise to hint at what is possible in the coming months.

Had they displayed an ounce more composure and a smidgen more detail in the frantic, frazzling first 30 minutes, they may have been in a position to spring one of the major surprises of the competition because they had it within them to take it to Leinster throughout.

But they were cut adrift thanks to some outstanding attacking rugby from Gordon D'Arcy and Brian O'Driscoll that gave them too much of a mountain to climb and set the Irish side on their way to a bonus point victory.

However, Dean Ryan's young guns can hold their heads high. They scored two brilliantly crafted tries through Mark Foster and Jack Adams, drove powerfully in the second half and stood up to the barrages when they came.

"Once, Leinster were at the same stage we are in terms of development and at times we are going to experience disappointments," head coach Dean Ryan said.

"There are some very disappointed people in that dressing room because we did some very good things. Unfortunately, they were not for long enough and not always in the area of the field that counted but we will get better after games like this."

It is worth remembering that four members of the Gloucester backline were making their Heineken Cup debuts and they were behind after four minutes. Leinster controlled a scrum 30 metres out and when D'Arcy drifted onto a lovely ball from Felipe Contepomi, he cut past Adams, straightened and went in for the try.

There is no doubt it came as quite a shock to Gloucester but they responded with a Ryan Lamb penalty and a sublime try that hints at the glorious talents they have available.

From an attacking scrum, James Forrester linked with Pete Richards and he looped twice in a move that drew Leinster's cover before sending Foster arrowing through O'Driscoll's cover and hurtling to the line for the try.

There is no doubt about the potential but Gloucester simply failed to manage the game in the way they would have wanted and were caught out again after 13 minutes. O'Driscoll's powerful surge allowed Denis Hickie to get deep inside Gloucester territory and just when the danger seemed to be subsiding, the visitors conceded again.

Anthony Allen got up to take Contepomi's chip but all he could do was palm it onto the post and the Leinster stand-off pounced to score.

Gloucester then gave away a succession of penalties after 22, 27 and 32 minutes that pushed the hosts 23-10 ahead and provided enough breathing space for them to become comfortable.

However, their third try will stick in Gloucester throats. The Kingsholm forwards, for whom Marco Bortolami, Christian Califano, Peter Buxton and Andy Hazell all shone, drove powerfully infield from a line-out that was blatantly hauled to the floor within Lamb's range.

And when Iain Balshaw could not take Lamb's pass, Leinster broke away through D'Arcy. James Bailey got back to make a splendid tackle on Hickie but he was able to give the scoring pass to the outstanding Stephen Keogh who scored.

It would be churlish to suggest it was the turning point of the game but the points swing was crucial. Leinster's lead was up to 20 and the distance was always too great.

But Gloucester did get a try back right on half-time when Richards and Lamb combined for Adams to collect brilliantly one-handed and he stepped inside the cover twice for a great score.

What the score did do was give Gloucester's hope. They were far more pragmatic in the second half and enjoyed greater field position to pin Leinster down for long periods. They lost Mal O'Kelly to the sinbin but it would just not go right for Gloucester. They were hampered by critical mistakes at the wrong time and it allowed the brilliant Keith Gleeson and his chums to slowly close the game out.

Gloucester gave it their all and then some but could not find the score that would have hinted at a comeback and when Jamie Heaslip led a Leinster break-out with 20 minutes to go, Shane Horgan sealed the bonus point victory when he went over from short range.

Leinster Team

15. Girvan Dempsey 14. Shane Horgan 13. Brian O'Driscoll 12. Gordon D'Arcy 11. Denis Hickie 10. Felipe Contepomi 9. Cillian Willis 1. Ronan McCormack 2. Brian Blaney 3. Will Green 4. Trevor Hogan 5. Malcolm O'Kelly 6. Stephen Keogh 7. Keith Gleeson 8. Jamie Heaslip

16. Harry Vermaas 17. Reggie Corrigan 18. Owen Finegan 19. Adam Byrnes 20. Andy Dunne 21. Kieran Lewis 22. Luke Fitzgerald

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. Christian Califano 2. Mefin Davies 3. Carlos Nieto 4. Adam Eustace 5. Marco Bortolami 6. Peter Buxton 7. Andy Hazell 8. James Forrester

16. Olivier Azam 17. Nick Wood 18. Jonathan Pendlebury 19. Jake Boer 20. Rory Lawson 21. Ludovic Mercier 22. Rudi Keil

HT: 30 - 17

Attendance: 22,530

JC