

# GLOUCESTER RUGBY

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2006**

GLOUCESTER SURGE TO CRUCIAL VICTORY

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 27 LONDON WASPS 21

If this was billed as the greatest test so far to Gloucester's Premiership credentials, they emerged from an enthralling contest with Wasps victorious in front of a sell-out Kingsholm.

They remain unbeaten and top of the table, momentum and confidence building with every performance they knit together on an unbeaten run that now stretches to eight games.

Beating Wasps is about winning the collisions and boxing clever at the breakdown and for the most part Gloucester did just that. They dominated Wasps in exactly the area the Londoners derive greatest satisfaction from spoiling – the forward phases. Gloucester were clinically superior at the set scrummage, were equally excellent in the line-out and knocked them backwards in the tackle area.

It was not a classic in the same manner as last year – the wet ground saw to that – but it was a tale of two titanic clubs socking the living daylights out of each other.

Both teams scored twice – Gloucester through James Bailey and Anthony Allen – and Wasps through James Haskell and Joe Ward, but critically the home side's scored were only two minutes apart in the second half and it opened up a crucial lead they never lost.

For their victory, Gloucester can thank a virtuoso performance from Christian Califano and the rest of his front row buddies at the set-piece. The Frenchman was built for scrummaging and he poured every ounce of his effort into dismantling Tim Payne.

Nick Wood was equally as impressive and Olivier Azam used his size to perfection. Peter Buxton, Jake Boer and Alex Brown tackled themselves to a standstill as Gloucester shaded a bitter feud in the contact area.

However, it started badly for the home side. They enjoyed plenty of possession in good areas of the field but fell behind to a smash and grab turn-over try after 12 minutes. Ward started the move from a line-out down the blindside, Tom Voyce burnt up the ground as Gloucester's cover failed to track him and he gave the scoring pass to James Haskell, who just managed to beat Mike Tindall to score.

Haskell was particularly impressive in the opening exchanges and when Mark Van Gisbergen landed a 20th minute penalty, Wasps were 10-0 on the scoreboard and edging the battle in terms of experience on the pitch.

But Gloucester dragged themselves back with a 22nd minute Willie Walker penalty and he shaved the gap to within one point at the break with two more penalties after 36 and 40 minutes.

It was just the impetus Gloucester needed, particularly after losing Brown to the sinbin for a professional foul at a ruck.

Gloucester then went 12-10 ahead with a fourth Walker penalty and with the squeeze on at the scrum and with Buxton and his chums prowling the choppy waters with serious intent, the home side started to play some rugby.

And then it happened. Gloucester desperately needed a try and after 55 minutes they got it. Last season Simpson-Daniel led Wasps a merry dance in the second half and here, he did it again.

Fielding a long clearance and after excellent link play from Luke Narraway, Simpson-Daniel sped through midfield and linked with James Bailey down the right. The winger was hauled down close to the line and Wasps turned possession over but the clearance kick was aimed straight at Bailey, who collected brilliantly and dived in to score.

It put Gloucester 17-10 ahead and two minutes later they were two scores in front. Wasps rolled possession to the right through Lawrence Dallaglio but replacement Tom Rees dropped the pass and Allen scooped up, broke through and had the legs to beat Fraser Waters to score from 60 metres.

Although Van Gisbergen cut the gap to 24-13 with a 61st minute penalty, Gloucester were in the process of closing out the game, to the delight of a partisan home crowd.

The key was keeping hands off the ball at the contact area and although they were successful for the most part, Wasps drove up field, won a line-out 10 metres out and hooker Shaw scored rather too easily down the blindside.

There was still time for Wasps to launch a series of attacks but Gloucester defended excellently in the later stages – kept formation and forced Dallaglio and his cronies into mistakes.

Both teams had churned themselves to a standstill and although Van Gisbergen kicked an 80th minute penalty to earn a bonus point, Gloucester had taken a huge leap in the Premiership.

"I am delighted with the victory and really pleased with the performance," said head coach Dean Ryan. "The last few weeks have been about a learning process and squad strength and we have answered those questions.

#### Gloucester Team

15. Willie Walker 14. James Bailey 13. Mike Tindall 12. Anthony Allen 11. James Simpson-Daniel 10. Ryan Lamb 9. Rory Lawson 1. Nick Wood 2. Olivier Azam 3. Christian Califano 4. Adam Eustace 5. Alex Brown 6. Peter Buxton 7. Jake Boer 8. Luke Narraway

16. Rob Elloway 17. Patrice Collazo 18. Jonathan Pendlebury 19. Adam Balding 20. Haydn Thomas 21. Jack Adams 22. Olly Morgan

London Wasps Team

15. Mark Van Gisbergen 14. Ed Thrower 13. Ayoola Erinle 12. Fraser Waters 11. Tom Voyce 10. Alex King 9. Simon Amor 1. Tim Payne 2. Joe Ward 3. Peter Bracken 4. Simon Shaw 5. Richard Birkett 6. James Haskell 7. Jonny O'Connor 8. Lawrence Dallaglio

16. Jonny Barrett 17. Ali McKenzie 18. George Skivington 19. Tom Rees 20. Mark McMillan 21. Dave Walder 22. Danny Cipriani

HT: 9 - 10

Attendance: 12,500

Referee: Martin Fox

JC