

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2006

LATE TRIES SEAL VICTORY FOR A TEAM

GLOUCESTER UTD. 22 LONDON IRISH 'A' 12

Late tries from hooker Ross McMillan and tight-head prop Jack Forster sealed Gloucester's first victory of the season in the Guinness A League – 22-12 over London Irish at Kingsholm.

The young forwards touched down after 65 and 77 minutes respectively to finally edge a knife-edge contest that was separated by only five points until Forster's touchdown.

The scores came from two powerful rolling mauls and Gloucester won by virtue of the fact they took their chances when they came and defended like demons in the second half.

London Irish, well served by flanker Steffon Armitage and full-back Justin Bishop, retained possession really well throughout but failed to make the most of their opportunities, particularly in the third quarter when they dominated Gloucester for long spells without making the telling incision.

For the hosts, skipper Jonathan Pendlebury led from the front in the line-outs and in defence, Will James got through plenty of work and Adam Balding carried the ball with his usual brand of damaging physicality, while McMillan threw well at the set-piece.

There was also a very impressive performance from openside Ejike Uzonique, whose workrate was terrific and defensive work tremendous.

Gloucester went in front after nine minutes when Mark Davies landed a penalty after Irish had been penalised for handling the ball in a ruck.

But the visitors showed why they were so dangerous with a try after 15 minutes. They kept the ball for what seemed like an age, scrum-half Richie Rees and stand-off Ben Willis instrumental in the attack that came to the left from where centre Matt Humphries and Bishop combined well to send prop Dan Murphy to the whitewash from short range.

The contest stayed at 5-3 until the final minute of the half when Gloucester scored their first try. They seemed to be losing momentum in midfield before Davies gained possession and kicked across field for Kyle Palm to take the catch, beat the first defender and use his pace to score from 30 metres.

Both teams worked tirelessly, particularly at the breakdown and Gloucester had to defend for their lives in the third quarter as Irish mounted a series of attacks.

It came as little surprise when they finally got the score they deserved. Armitage broke off the back of a maul to burst through a thicket of defenders and slide home to make it 12-10 to the Irish.

Gloucester could have wilted here but they battled back. Davies drove two penalties into the 22 and when James held a line-out catch, Gloucester drove hard towards the line and McMillan was awarded the score.

The hosts had their tails up now and completed an excellent recovery in the final minute when Forster, celebrating a new two-year contract, was in the vanguard of another punishing drive to seal a very good Gloucester victory.