

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2006

BRISTOL END UNBEATEN RUN

BRISTOL RUGBY 14 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 12

Gloucester's unbeaten Guinness Premiership record was drop-kicked into oblivion at a riotous Memorial Stadium thanks to Jason Strange's injury-time strike.

It sealed a remarkably intense contest and shot Bristol back to the top of the table with the final play of the match. This was a tale of two teams slugging the living daylights out of each other in conditions that rendered virtually everything behind the scrum meaningless.

The fact Gloucester lost will be a bitter, bitter pill to swallow but they can take a huge amount from their efforts, particularly in the second half when they came within an ace of snatching the game.

“The fact we stayed in a game for 87 minutes, in terrible conditions, away from home and gave ourselves the opportunity to win is very encouraging, not just for now but later on in the season,” said head coach Dean Ryan. “If we keep doing that, I am positive we will be in the mix come the end of the season.

“We are not going to get emotionally shaken up because we lost this game – we have shown enough to bounce right back.”

The amazing thing about the Strange's effort was that Bristol kept hold of the ball for a huge number of phases – something neither side had managed to do all evening because of the conditions.

They rolled on and on and when in range, Strange slotted brilliantly between the sticks to seal a tough, tense derby.

Seven minutes earlier it looked as though Gloucester might produce the result that had smash and grab written all over it. The conditions certainly aided Bristol – Gloucester were unable to unleash their outside backs with any conviction because of the weather – but thanks to four Willie Walker penalties, the visitors held a one point lead.

As a spectacle, it was horrific but there was plenty for the enthusiast who glories in the grim and grotty to get excited about. Bristol made a powerful start, stoked by the ceaseless energy of Mark Regan and powerful strides of Dan Ward-Smith, who was excellent throughout, they scored after only five minutes.

It was a terrific score given the conditions and started when scrum-half Brian O’Riordan kicked towards James Bailey. Although the Gloucester winger held the catch, he was driven back and lost the ball.

O’Riordan kicked again and Pete Buxton was forced back inside his 22. With Bristol streaming forward, they shifted play to the right before Regan was sent to the line on the left from David Lemi’s pass.

When Olivier Azam was penalised after 14 minutes, David Hill kicked Bristol 8-0 ahead with a penalty as Gloucester slithered in the wet and Bristol made the most of any opportunity.

Both teams waged a savage close-quarter battle and traded blow after blow but Walker got Gloucester up and running with a 24th minute penalty after Bristol were penalised for coming in from the side at a maul.

Despite the number of errors, it was Bristol who dominated. They kicked wonderfully well, got amongst Gloucester at the line-out and generally made life very uncomfortable.

And after Mike Tindall and Olly Morgan failed to tidy up deep inside their own half, Hill dropped a goal to hand Bristol a 11-3 lead.

However, Gloucester hit back with penalties from Walker after 36 and 40 minutes to trail by only two points at the break.

The second period was short of clear-cut opportunities as both teams traded possession and set-piece dominance but when they did arrive, particularly for Gloucester from a series of scrummages, they failed to control the ball well enough.

But as time ticked down, Gloucester started to edge the forward exchanges, drove possession vigorously through the likes of Jake Boer, Peter Buxton, Azam and Adam Eustace and kicked towards an extremely hesitant Lee Robinson on the wing.

Ryan introduced Patrice Collazo, Adam Balding and Jack Forster for fresh impetus and with the clock ticking down, Bristol were penalised for hauling down a driving maul on the left, 30 metres out. Walker stepped up, held his nerve and kicked Gloucester 12-11 ahead with five minutes remaining.

Then came the dramatic closing stages. Bristol simply controlled the ball brilliantly at the contact area – Ward-Smith, Gareth Llewellyn and Regan leading the charge.

Gloucester simply could not halt the move and as it came infield, O’Riordan fired back to replacement Strange who slipped his kick between the posts to break Gloucester hearts.

Bristol Team

15. Craig Morgan 14. Lee Robinson 13. Neil Brew 12. Rob Higgitt
11. David Lemi 10. David Hill 9. Brian O’Riordan 1. Dave Hilton
2. Mark Regan 3. Darren Crompton 4. Roy Winters 5. Gareth Llewellyn
6. Nathan Budgett 7. Joe El Abd 8. Dan Ward-Smith

16. David Blaney 17. Alex Clarke 18. Mariano Sambucetti 19. Alfie To’oala Vaeluaga 20. Greg Nicholls 21. Jason Strange 22. Josh Taumalolo

Gloucester Rugby Team

15. Olly Morgan 14. James Bailey 13. Mike Tindall 12. Anthony Allen
11. James Simpson-Daniel 10. Willie Walker 9. Haydn Thomas 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. Jack Forster 18. Patrice Collazo 19. Adam Balding
20. Jack Adams 21. Jonathan Pendlebury 22. Brad Davies

HT: 11 - 9

Attendance: 11,916

Referee: Rob Debney

JC