

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2006

BONUS POINT WIN KEEPS EURO DREAM ALIVE

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 38 EDINBURGH RUGBY 22

In perhaps their most singularly important match of the season to date, Gloucester gave themselves a Heineken Cup life-line with a bonus point victory over Edinburgh.

It was a tremendous contest, fortified by both team's differing styles and the knowledge that a defeat for the home side would spell the end of their European dreams for this season.

They responded with the sort of dynamism and drive that is the sole reserve of this competition. Edinburgh were drilled at the set-piece – dismantled in the scrum and taken to task at the line-out – which meant they played off the cuff rugby to great effect throughout and it caused no end of problems for the hosts.

But Gloucester had enough about them to run out comfortable winners thanks to their forward supremacy, but for a time there was an uneasy feeling swirling around Kingsholm.

However, through the efforts of Carlos Nieto, who had his most destructive set-piece afternoon of the season and the typically fiery approach of both Olivier Azam and Patrice Collazo, Gloucester dominated the set phases and did well enough at the breakdown – a frantic, often confused area of the game that did the home side no favours whatsoever – to emerge winners.

Gloucester needed all the savvy of Jake Boer, the organisational subtleties of Alex Brown and control of Marco Bortolami to wrestle control.

From the moment Edinburgh's front row became rather too close to the Kingsholm turf for their liking in the virtually the very first minute, Gloucester cranked up the heat and they were ahead after only 12 minutes.

Mark Foster initially caused the problems when he chased after his own chip down the left and from the five metre scrum that followed, Willie Walker slid a lovely little kick in behind Edinburgh's defence and Mike Tindall pounced to score.

Gloucester were powerful in the physical exchanges and purposeful in attack and doubled their lead four minutes later. Edinburgh's scrum disappeared at a rate of knots and Buxton was quickly on number eight Dave Callam. When the Scots recycled the ball, Phil Godman's wild pass was picked up by James Simpson-Daniel and he sprinted to the line to make it 14-0.

However, that was the last mistake Godman was to make for a while. The number 10 combined brilliantly with his scrum-half Mike Blair and when the visitors ran back a wayward Gloucester line-out, they kept the ball very effectively for winger Ben Cairns to bump off a couple of tackles and score.

Their ability to slow ball at the contact and then play loose when in possession, was a major advantage at this stage and Chris Paterson shaved the deficit to four points when he kicked a 29th minute penalty.

Gloucester's most effective work was done by their forwards. Edinburgh were bumped around by the likes of Azam, who carried ball as well as anyone and the excellence of Nieto. And it was no surprise when the Gloucester hooker was driven over from a close-range line-out to make it 19-10 after 33 minutes.

Those who thought that would be that were very much mistaken. A distinct edginess crept into Gloucester's game and Edinburgh hit back with a second try of their own when Hugo Southwell scored in the right corner following brilliant approach play by Callam and some devilish work by Blair.

And when Marcus Di Rollo scored in the first minute of the second half after another neat break by Godman and an even better surge by Blair, Edinburgh tied the scores at 22-22 and the contest was wide open.

Although Walker snuck over a drop-goal after 46 minutes to re-establish the lead, the changes were coming. Both Rory Lawson and Ryan Lamb were introduced to get the ball through the hands quicker and away from the confusion of the contact area and Lamb kicked Gloucester into field position to buy some territory.

The screw was slowly turning – the home-town forwards led the way in their own determined fashion and with time ebbing away, Gloucester claimed the crucial bonus point with probably the best try at Kingsholm this season.

Olly Morgan fielded a high kick and linked with Simpson-Daniel, the winger slaloming his way through a series of desperate defenders, before Adam Balding came in to support. Gloucester took possession dangerously close to the touchline but Lawson and Lamb came to recycle, Anthony Allen and Simpson-Daniel created even more mayhem and when Lawson shifted play onto Bortolami, the skipper had enough about him to put Allen home in the corner from where it all started.

It was a wonderful score and took Gloucester 33-22 ahead with only minutes remaining. There was still time for Foster to plunge over for a well-deserved try in added on time, as Gloucester gave themselves a Heineken Cup foothold.

Gloucester Team

15. Olly Morgan 14. James Simpson-Daniel 13. Mike Tindall
12. Anthony Allen 11. Mark Foster 10. Willie Walker 9. Peter Richards
1. Patrice Collazo 2. Olivier Azam 3. Carlos Nieto 4. Marco Bortolami
5. Alex Brown 6. Peter Buxton 7. Jake Boer 8. Luke Narraway

16. Rob Elloway 17. Christian Califano 18. Adam Eustace 19. Adam Balding
20. Rory Lawson 21. Ryan Lamb 22. Iain Balshaw

Edinburgh Rugby Team

15. Hugo Southwell 14. Chris Paterson 13. Marcus Di Rollo 12. Duncan Hodge 11. Ben Cairns 10. Phil Godman 9. Mike Blair 1. Allan Jacobsen 2. Dougie Hall 3. Alasdair Dickinson 4. Matt Mustchin 5. Scott Murray 6. Alasdair Strokosch 7. Ross Rennie 8. David Callam

16. Andrew Kelly 17. Dave Hewett 18. Fergus Pringle 19. Simon Taylor 20. Steven Turnbull 21. Greig Laidlaw 22. John Senior

HT: 22 - 17

Attendance: 9,749

JC