

GLoucester Rugby

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2006

MORGAN'S TRY SEALS FIVE-POINTER

EDINBURGH RUGBY 14 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 31

You can only admire them. Gloucester's Heineken Cup quest remains intact following a bonus point victory over Edinburgh. They have known about the size of their task for a while now – four straight victories are required for a place in the knockout stages – and half of the job has been accomplished.

The foundations for this victory were laid last weekend at Kingsholm. The physical and emotional scars inflicted on Edinburgh were always going to take some healing and Gloucester set about them with relish once again.

At the present time there is no such thing as a lost cause or a dead game. And nothing at Murrayfield summed that up more than Gloucester's second try, scored by Mike Tindall, who somehow chased down a speculative little roller from Willie Walker to beat Ben Cairns and set in motion a devastating final 15 minutes that brought two more tries. Tindall is in a rich vein just now and his sign of desperation to reach the ball first summed up Gloucester's entire effort.

When the front row weren't dominating the scrums for the second time in eight days, skipper Marco Bortolami and Alex Brown were ruling the roost at the line-out, Andy Hazell leading the defensive effort and Peter Buxton producing the sort of performance that had quality stamped all over it.

Gloucester were quite clearly the better side – it just took them an awfully long time to convert it into points. The first-half was a fractious, bumpy affair and although Gloucester did plenty of good things, they were not always in the best areas of the field for them to take advantage.

Ryan Lamb, trying desperately hard to impress, had one of his in and out days in the game management department and it was not before Luke Narraway – another who impressed – crossed in the 36th minute for the game's opening score that Gloucester began to tighten the screw.

The score came when Anthony Allen chased a box kick from Rory Lawson and Buxton thundered possession forward down the left. When play was recycled, Tindall and Allen combined and Narraway crossed in the opposite corner.

Edinburgh, under pressure in the tight, had a go from deep and were well served by Alasdair Strokosch and Simon Taylor but they could get nothing going behind the scrum in the first-half.

Their best chance came in the second minute when Marcus Di Rollo intercepted a pass from Lamb deep inside his own half but Iain Balshaw had the wheels to make a crucial tackle beneath his own posts and Alex Brown killed the move with another vital interception to force the knock-on.

However, the hosts were able to sustain a move long enough at the start of the second period through prop Allan Jacobsen and Taylor before Strokosch dived on the loose ball over the line to bring the scores back to 10-7.

It was just what Gloucester didn't need and Edinburgh began to run the ball from deep with more conviction and greater urgency.

But they fell to pieces on Gloucester's defence. If Tindall was not forcing someone back in the tackle then a Buxton, Hazell, Brown or Bortolami appeared to make the hit.

And from the turnovers, Gloucester ran riot. Head coach Dean Ryan introduced both Willie Walker and Peter Richards at this stage and both played key roles.

After Tindall had pounced from Walker's 59th minute grubber, Gloucester sniffed an unlikely bonus point. And when they turned the ball over deep inside their own half with 11 minutes remaining, Walker's long pass found Allen in space and he linked with Mark Foster.

The winger did well to keep the move alive and feed Tindall on the burst and with Edinburgh in retreat, the England man put Allen in the clear for the score.

More was to follow for Gloucester with five minutes to go. Although they lost Buxton to the sinbin, Walker's persistence paid dividends when he stole possession and somehow got a kick away that stayed away from the line to allow replacement Olly Morgan to pick up and race in for try number four.

It took Gloucester 31-7 ahead and gave a clearer indication of their dominance that had been laid by the forwards and fatally exposed by the likes of Tindall and Allen.

There was still time for Gloucester to lose Walker to the sinbin and for Cairns to score for the hosts but Gloucester's victory was not in doubt and they will travel to Agen in the new year with everything to play for.

Edinburgh Team

15. Hugo Southwell 14. Chris Paterson 13. Marcus Di Rollo 12. Andrew Easson 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. Alan MacDonald 8. Simon Taylor

16. Andrew Kelly 17. Dave Hewett 18. Fergus Pringle 19. David Callam 20. John Senior 21. Duncan Hodge 22. Matt Dey

Gloucester Rugby Team

15. Iain Balshaw 14. James Simpson-Daniel 13. Mike Tindall 12. Anthony Allen 11. Mark Foster 10. Ryan Lamb 9. Rory Lawson 1. Nick Wood 2. Olivier Azam 3. Carlos Nieto 4. Marco Bortolami 5. Alex Brown 6. Peter Buxton 7. Andy Hazell 8. Luke Narraway

16. Rob Elloway 17. Christian Califano 18. Adam Eustace 19. Adam Balding 20. Peter Richards 21. Willie Walker 22. Olly Morgan

HT: 0 - 10

Attendance: 4,125

JC