

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, JANUARY 6, 2007

GLOUCESTER DENIED BY SALE COMEBACK

SALE SHARKS 20 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 19

Dean Ryan paid tribute to his 'real Gloucester' after Guinness Premiership champions Sale Sharks overturned a 16-3 half-time deficit to win a mini-classic in Stockport.

Fortified with the knowledge his developing side have once again found their rhythm in a contest stoked to the brim with ferocity and physicality, Ryan is confident his team are heading in the right direction despite the one point defeat.

"That was the real Gloucester and that is what is important to me," he said. "I thought we showed what we want to be about as a group and that is really encouraging.

"Of course it hurts to lose in that way and of course there are areas where we could have been smarter but this is the sort of side I want to be involved in because I know we are moving in the right direction.

"We just need to be a bit smarter to close those games out, learn from the good bits and take this forward."

When Ryan Lamb was not bubbling away with intent at fly-half, Iain Balshaw was hitting the line with pace, Mike Tindall was carrying the ball with vigorous intent and James Simpson-Daniel was hunting menacingly on the wing.

In the first-half at least, Gloucester's game was smothered with good things – invention, attacking threat and physicality – and with the likes of Alex Brown knocking most things blue into the middle of next week, Gloucester strung themselves together a lead that should have won them the game.

But Sale responded in the second half superbly. Down to the last dregs at stand-off, they were soon without starting 10 David Blair and in the second half Daniel Larrechea limped off to leave the Sharks with Richard Wigglesworth and Sililo Martens at half-back and the pair were inspired and injected the impetus the home side needed.

However, their real heroes were the likes of Juan Fernandez-Lobbe, the imposing flanker and the brilliant Chris Jones at lock, who gave Sale the go forward to claw themselves back into the match.

Gloucester were 6-0 ahead after 15 minutes with two Lamb penalties. The first came when Simpson-Daniel came speeding in off his wing on an outside break to feed Peter Buxton and the Sharks were penalised for killing the ball.

The second also put Lobbe in the cooler but Sale hit back with three points of their own after 17 minutes when Blair landed a penalty from 30 metres.

But it was Gloucester who carried the greater threat and greater invention. Although Lamb landed a third penalty after 23 minutes, Gloucester had to wait until the 38th minute for their first try.

Tindall carried the ball hard over the half-way line and fed Balshaw, who kicked brilliantly down the line behind the Sale defence. Simpson-Daniel tracked the ball and hunted down Larrechea, who somehow missed his clearance kick and Simpson-Daniel pounced to score.

Lamb's conversion took Gloucester 16-3 ahead and there was no hint at what was to come in the frantic second half.

Sale simply grabbed the initiative through the physicality of their forwards and power of Martens, who proved to be a real handful at the contact area.

With Lobbe, Jones and Magnus Lund getting through a mountain of work, Sale clawed their way back, helped by a number of Gloucester mistakes.

When they gave away a cheap penalty on half-way, the Sharks drove the ball into the far corner and although the visitors held out a number of short-range drives close to the line through outstanding defence, Wigglesworth took Martens' pass and put Chris Bell home by the posts on an angled break past Lamb.

The conversion made it 16-10 and although Lamb blocked out the boos to make it 19-10 with a 59th minute penalty, Gloucester couldn't hold their lead.

When they turned over ball after knocking on at a line-out that was heading into Sale territory, the Sharks once again mounted a blistering late charge.

Lobbe and Jones all had a go from the line-out and with the ball almost over the line, replacement hooker Sebastien Bruno touched down to bring Sale back to 17-19.

There was still more to come and Gloucester could have sealed the match late on when replacement Peter Richards straightened an attack brilliantly inside the 22 but with men outside him he broke back infield and Sale's frantic scrambling defence saved the day.

Sale were desperate now and from a half-way line scrum, Martens made an angled break to find Jason Robinson on the burst. Although he was hauled down, the referee spotted an off-side in midfield and Wigglesworth stepped up to kick the penalty and seal and remarkable comeback victory for Sale.

Gloucester Rugby would like to apologise for the lateness of the match report due to technical difficulties in Stockport last night, kind regards.

Sharks Team

15. Daniel Larrechea 14. Jason Robinson 13. Mark Taylor 12. Chris Bell
11. Chris Mayor 10. David Blair 9. Richard Wigglesworth 1. Lionel
Faure 2. Andy Titterrell 3. Barry Stewart 4. Chris Jones 5. Dean
Schofield 6. Juan Martin Fernandez Lobbe 7. Magnus Lund 8. Sebastien
Chabal

16. Sebastien Bruno 17. Eifion Roberts 18. Stuart Turner 19. Christian
Day 20. Sililo Martens 21. Ben Foden 22. Nathan Bonner-Evans

Gloucester Rugby Team

15. Olly Morgan 14. James Simpson-Daniel 13. Mike Tindall
12. Anthony Allen 11. Iain Balshaw 10. Ryan Lamb 9. Rory Lawson
1. Nick Wood 2. Mefin Davies 3. Carlos Nieto 4. Marco Bortolami
5. Alex Brown 6. Peter Buxton 7. Andy Hazell 8. James Forrester

16. Olivier Azam 17. Christian Califano 18. Jonathan Pendlebury
19. Jake Boer 20. Peter Richards 21. Willie Walker 22. Mark Foster

HT: 3 - 16

Attendance: 8,377

JC