

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, JANUARY 27, 2007

FIVE-TRY GLOUCESTER STUN SALE

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 44 SALE SHARKS 24

By collecting their first try-bonus point in the Guinness Premiership this season, Gloucester took full advantage of Sale's crushing injury problems to heap more misery on the current champions at Kingsholm.

When they were hot – and at times they were molten – Gloucester looked a very accomplished and threatening all-round unit, combining a high level of physicality with an attacking potency that threatened to swamp the visitors.

A devastating mixture of high field position, damaging offensive runners and ultra-powerful defending created the platform for a commanding victory. Only when they started to play from too deep in the middle part of the match and their clarity of execution was spoilt by too many off-loads did Sale mount a recovery.

It was a significant victory for Gloucester and once again had some telling individuals at its heart. Gloucester have known for some time about the physicality created by Mike Tindall but his contribution is much more than that.

Here, he carried the ball with the power and presence of a train, created room for others as a result and was generally a right handful all afternoon as the main point of Gloucester's attack and a central element in their defence.

It allows the likes of Iain Balshaw, James Simpson-Daniel and Ryan Lamb to strut their stuff to maximum benefit and throw in the likes of Adam Balding – who has shifted Gloucester's forward axis in recent weeks with another towering performance, Andy Hazell, Alex Brown and Co. – and the concoction is potent.

Their first try came after 90 seconds and it had Tindall at its heart. Andy Titterrell's line-out missed the target and Tindall powered his way through midfield and sent Hazell and Brown on sorties further on before Balshaw came to add his support.

With Sale frantically re-organising their defence, Lamb again used Tindall before Brown set up a ruck close to the line. When possession came back, Lamb half-stepped and dummied forward to claim the try.

He converted his own score and Gloucester led 7-0. That became 10-3 – Sale's Rhys Jones – the son of coach Kingsley Jones – had a wonderful afternoon with the boot for the visitors – but they simply had no answer to the ferocity of Gloucester's start.

And when James Bailey fielded Jones' clearance kick and ran through a thicket of defenders, the home side won a penalty that scrum-half Rory Lawson took quickly and he fed Balshaw, who turned on the gas to reach the line on a diagonal break for a lovely try.

That made it 17-3 and another Gloucester score then would have virtually sealed the contest but Sale hit back with a score of their own and it was clever and sharp.

They controlled possession deep inside Gloucester territory and from a line-out, Ben Foden broke blind and weaved his way in to score a very good try.

The try cut the gap to 10 points and although Gloucester lost Lamb before the break with an ankle injury – although an X-ray later said it was not broken – the home side scored again before the break.

Brown held a towering line-out catch and when the squeeze came on, hooker Olivier Azam was bundled in for the try. Ludovic Mercier's first task was to curl in the conversion and he did it to perfection.

Gloucester's dominance continued after the re-start. They didn't allow the likes of Sebastien Chabal or Juan Martin Fernandez Lobbe room to carry the ball and although Sale made a real fist of it at the scrum and the contact area, Gloucester just clattered away.

And when the brilliant Balding and the equally effective Lawson set in motion a wave of attacks that also included a telling break from Simpson-Daniel, skipper Marco Bortolami claimed the bonus point score to take Gloucester 34-10 ahead.

But it was now when the wheels started to wobble slightly. To Sale's credit, they did give it one almighty go and with Richard Wigglesworth looking a very accomplished performer, the Sharks scored twice within the space of five minutes.

First, lock Dean Schofield hammered home down the left after a period of heavy Sale pressure and they then scored a brilliant team try after 56 minutes.

Ben Foden and Wigglesworth combined from a scrum and the stand-off put Chris Mayor through a large midfield gap and the centre finished beautifully by the sticks.

Jones converted both and suddenly there were only 10 points in it at 34-24. If there were a few jitters in the home side they didn't show it and Mercier stretched the gap to 37-24 with a 68th minute penalty.

Gloucester then sealed the match with their fifth try and again it involved Tindall. He hit possession up the middle from a line-out and with the Sale defence sucked in, Pete Richards found Simpson-Daniel and he gave the scoring pass to Olly Morgan, who sealed a comprehensive and very important victory for Gloucester.

Gloucester Team

15. Iain Balshaw 14. James Bailey 13. Jack Adams 12. Mike Tindall 11. James Simpson-Daniel 10. Ryan Lamb 9. Rory Lawson 1. Christian Califano 2. Olivier Azam 3. Carlos Nieto 4. Marco Bortolami 5. Alex Brown 6. Peter Buxton 7. Andy Hazell 8. Adam Balding

16. Mefin Davies 17. Nick Wood 18. Will James 19. Luke Narraway 20. Peter Richards 21. Ludovic Mercier 22. Olly Morgan

Sale Sharks Team

15. Rhys Jones 14. Chris Bell 13. Chris Mayor 12. Mark Taylor
11. Oriol Ripol Fortuny 10. Richard Wigglesworth 9. Ben Foden
1. Eifion Roberts 2. Andy Titterrell 3. Barry Stewart 4. Dean Schofield
5. Christian Day 6. Chris Jones 7. Juan Martin Fernandez Lobbe
8. Sebastien Chabal

16. Sebastien Bruno 17. Stuart Turner 18. Ben Evans 19. David Tait
20. Mike Hills 21. Andy Vilk 22. Matt Riley

HT: 27 - 10

Attendance: 12,058

JC