

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2007

BAILEY'S TRY SEALS DERBY VICTORY

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 33 WORCESTER WARRIORS 19

It was far from a thing of beauty but Gloucester clawed themselves to a vital victory over Worcester to enhance their play-off credentials after a typically tight and tense derby at Kingsholm.

Worcester will be wondering from here to eternity how they failed to claim their first ever Premiership victory over Gloucester because for the vast majority of this enthralling if low quality contest, they were much the better side.

In fact, Gloucester's head coach Dean Ryan went as far as saying they missed a 'gilt edged opportunity' to win the match and he was not wrong.

Their line-out was wonderfully effective, their dynamism in the contact area unforgiving and their desire a real handful and it took Gloucester to the limit.

"I would go as far as saying that was one of our poorest performances of the season," Ryan said. "Worcester had a great opportunity to win here and we backed that up with a poor display. Without Peter Richards and Andy Hazell we would have lost the game – I am very disappointed with the general outcome.

"We were flat and in front of our own supporters that is not good enough."

Richards and Hazell were indeed outstanding. The scrum-half was his dynamic self, prompting, probing and defending brilliantly.

His one-man demolition job on stand-off James Brown was a game-turning moment as early as the 14 minute when he tracked back brilliantly to use all his pace and determination to haul down the Worcester man who seemed certain to score following great work by Thinus Delpont and Dale Rasmussen.

Hazell was no less influential. He is ridiculously physical, doesn't give a tinker's cuss about his own personal safety and here was a one-man dynamo to maintain Gloucester's competitiveness. When he somehow covered an attack that looked to provide a try for Delpont in the first half, Worcester must have known it was not to be their day.

But such was the importance of the Worcester start, it looked as though they had the wherewithal to build a lead that could have been decisive.

Although Alex Brown held a brilliant catch from the start, Worcester piled forward and were soon ahead when James Brown dropped a goal and landed a sixth minute penalty following great carrying work from the impressive number eight Kai Hortsmann.

Worcester were everything you expect at the breakdown – physical, disruptive and determined – and it shook Gloucester to the core. The home side were very fortunate to go ahead when an overthrown line-out ended with Brown but Peter Buxton was through quickly, charged his kick down, kept his composure to gather the ball and score by the sticks.

Ryan Lamb's conversion made it 7-6 and Gloucester slowly built a lead through the number 10's boot with penalties after 19 and 24 minutes.

But that failed to dampen Worcester's fire and when Luke Narraway was called for pulling down at a line-out – something the visitors got away with all afternoon – Brown cut the gap to 13-9. And when Worcester somehow turned over possession under pressure from Rudi Keil, who got away his round-the-corner pass to Mark Foster three minutes after the re-start, Gloucester were 20-9 ahead and seemingly home and hosed.

However, it was now when Worcester's backs came alive too. Rasmussen and Havili always carry hard but here Matt Powell and Brown added a touch of quality. From a scrum on half-way, Powell was involved twice in a move down the right and he was able to get his scoring pass away to Lee Best to open the contest up once more.

It was slowly developing into a classic finale and when Brown landed a 67th minute penalty, Gloucester's lead had been trimmed to 20-19. Worcester must have sensed victory but through the efforts of Hazell, Buxton and Alex Brown, not to mention Richards, Gloucester just managed to keep hold of their advantage for Ludovic Mercier, a replacement for Lamb, to kick a 69th minute penalty.

With a four-point lead, Gloucester sealed the match four minutes from time. Richards launched a dazzling breakout and when possession found its way to Simpson-Daniel – almost for the first time in the match – the Gloucester winger got through a tackle and sent his pass on to Hazell. The flanker flew into the Worcester danger zone and as the cover came across got his pass away to James Bailey, who finished the contest with the third and decisive try, not a minute too soon.

Gloucester Team

15. Jon Goodridge 14. James Simpson-Daniel 13. Rudi Keil 12. Jack Adams 11. Mark Foster 10. Ryan Lamb 9. Peter Richards 1. Nick Wood 2. Olivier Azam 3. Christian Califano 4. Will James 5. Alex Brown 6. Peter Buxton 7. Andy Hazell 8. Luke Narraway

16. Mefin Davies 17. Jack Forster 18. Adam Eustace 19. Jonathan Pendlebury 20. Haydn Thomas 21. Ludovic Mercier 22. James Bailey

Worcester Warriors Team

15. Lee Best 14. 'Aisea Havili Kaufusi 13. Dale Rasmussen 12. Gary Trueman 11. Thinus Delpont 10. James Brown 9. Matt Powell 1. Tony Windo 2. Chris Fortey 3. Tevita Taumoepeau 4. Craig Gillies 5. Tim Collier 6. Pat Sanderson 7. Tom Harding 8. Kai Horstmann

16. Callum Black 17. Aleki Lutui 18. Phil Murphy 19. Gavin Quinnell
20. Nick Runciman 21. Simon Whatling 22. Mark Tucker

HT: 13-9

Attendance: 12,500

JC