

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, APRIL 7, 2007

TWO-TRY GLOUCESTER DENIED WIN AT REC

BATH RUGBY 21 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 21

Those Kingsholm folk who say this, that and the other about Gloucester's inability to win at Bath will once again be scratching their heads over another curiously unfulfilled journey to the Rec.

Despite out-scoring their hosts two tries to nil and playing much the more incisive rugby in the first-half, a chronic dose of conservatism cost Gloucester a victory against their foes on the banks of the Avon and a chance to regain top spot in the Guinness Premiership.

Inside the Gloucester camp, this draw will feel like a defeat – despite the all-round excellence of Bath's mighty forward pack in the second half that created enough pressure for Olly Barkley to land seven successive penalties.

Gloucester simply stopped playing, a bout of nervousness preventing them from claiming a victory that was well within their compass. Instead of maintaining their initiative, they waited for a mistake here or a penalty there to keep them in it and they never came.

When they ran the ball with speed and invention through the slick hands of Ryan Lamb, Anthony Allen and James Simpson-Daniel – combining their pace and cutting edge with an ability to shift play all over the field – Bath couldn't cope and their forwards were out on their feet at the end of the first-half.

What is more, Bath created precisely nothing as an attacking force all afternoon. Their forwards were indeed excellent as the game progressed but they were hardly a thing of beauty outside and that will hurt Gloucester even more.

They did nip into a 6-0 lead with Barkley's first two penalties – the first when Olivier Azam was off-side at a ruck and the second when Tom Cheeseman ran back Iain Balshaw's sliced kick and won a penalty with Gloucester on the wrong side at the breakdown.

But Lamb got Gloucester going with a penalty and with Andy Hazell in riotous form in the tackle area, Carlos Nieto piecing together a scrummaging performance that had Bath in tatters at times and Marco Bortolami churning everything together, Gloucester found themselves.

First, Allen motored past Chris Malone's tackle with their first meaningful line-break to hint at what was to come and although Barkley made it 9-3 when he slotted home his third kick with Bortolami in the sinbin, Gloucester hit back with a try.

Mike Tindall ran back a clearance before Lamb sent Balshaw away down the left. They continued to shift the angle of the attack with Azam and Peter Buxton heavily involved before the flanker gave the scoring pass inside to Will James, who bundled round behind the sticks.

Eight minutes later, Gloucester were in again and it was a lovely score. It started with another punishing effort at a scrum before Buxton clattered into a ruck and then Lamb, head up and motoring, glided through a gap on an angled break and delivered a beautiful flat pass out past replacement Michael Stephenson for James Bailey to score in the corner.

It established a 15-9 interval lead and hinted at what was possible if they maintained their aggressive and attacking intent. However, in the second half it was not to be – despite the foraging of Hazell and the industrious work of Nieto and Buxton.

Gloucester started to kick from first phase ball, something they had not done previously, Rory Lawson had a kick charged down, boots and hands started to appear in rucks and Bath gradually turned up the pressure.

Lamb did take Gloucester 18-9 ahead with a 45th minute penalty but when Barkley slotted over after Gloucester had hauled down a maul, the tide began to turn.

For Bath, Lee Mears and Matt Stevens got through a tremendous amount of work in the loose, Michael Lipman appeared in the wide areas to lend his power to the attacks and Gloucester went from ruck to ruck on the back foot. When Lawson was charged down by Andy Williams and Tindall was sacked beneath his own posts, Barkley made it 18-15 as the pressure mounted.

Gloucester did, though, have a couple of great chances to win the match. They both involved Simpson-Daniel and his first weaving break from deep was cut short by a high tackle that Lamb converted to make it 21-15 and then in the latter stages he threw his intended pass to Balshaw into touch that would have created the try that won the game.

Despite Gloucester's six point lead there was not an air of permanency about it and when Azam stuck his foot into a ruck, Barkley shaved three more points off the deficit with his sixth successful kick.

It was panning out just how Bath's pack would have wanted it too. They caused no end of grief in the loose and simply kept the ball, taking the tackles and creating another defensive Gloucester ruck.

With time ticking down, Bath earned the penalty that sealed the draw when Will James was penalised for a high tackle on Nick Abendanon – Bath's most creative wide player – and Barkley made no mistake to earn the hosts a draw and leave Gloucester scratching their heads again.

Bath Team

15. Nick Abendanon 14. Joe Maddock 13. Shaun Berne 12. Olly Barkley 11. Tom Cheeseman 10. Chris Malone 9. Andy Williams 1. David Barnes 2. Lee Mears 3. Matt Stevens 4. Steve Borthwick 5. Danny Grewcock 6. Andy Beattie 7. Michael Lipman 8. Zak Feau'nati

16. Pieter Dixon 17. Aaron Jarvis 18. Peter Short 19. Jonny Fa'amatuainu 20. Pietro Travagli 21. Michael Stephenson 22. Chev Walker

Gloucester Rugby Team

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

16. Rob Elloway 17. Jack Forster 18. Adam Eustace 19. Jake Boer 20. Peter Richards 21. Willie Walker 22. Mark Foster

HT: 9-15

Attendance: 10,600

JC