

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2007

PACK POWER SETS UP VITAL VICTORY

LEICESTER TIGERS 17 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 30

Gloucester breathed yet more momentum into their perfect Guinness Premiership start with a commanding, thoroughly convincing victory over Leicester at Welford Road.

It is no mean feat to pull apart a collection of forwards who inhabit the dark recesses of Welford Road but Gloucester did it to put a serious marker down about their future aspirations this season.

The margin of victory was total but it could have been even greater given Gloucester's all-round superiority – particularly of the set scrummage – the platform that allowed Willie Walker to control the contest at half-back.

At the how's your father end of things, Gloucester's defensive organisation and execution was magnificent and when they played with simplicity and clean execution, they were hard to handle with ball in hand.

But the tale of the contest was at close quarters. Although both teams were missing a raft of players who will undoubtedly enhance their credentials later in the season, Gloucester dismantled Leicester to their component parts. Carlos Nieto was terrific, Patrice Collazo wonderfully engaging at the scrum and Olivier Azam a nuisance at ruck-time.

There can be very few times in recent history that a Leicester pack have opted for a line-out rather than a scrummage at Welford Road and the decision was utter vindication of Gloucester's dominance. It kept a crowd of fractionally over 17,000 exceptionally quiet as Gloucester slowly but surely established a platform that would never break.

Although the line-out struggled through over-complication, the likes of Alasdair Strokosch, Peter Buxton and Luke Narryway tackled themselves to a standstill and it prevented Leicester gaining any sort of momentum until the very end.

Louis Deacon, Luke Abraham and Jordan Crane tried manfully but they were swept up in Gloucester's defensive organisation and sheer weight of tackle.

The importance of this victory in the long-term is huge because it creates such a gap between Gloucester and other teams scenting potential glory.

Gloucester were off and running after three minutes. Leicester controlled the ball on half-way and when Andy Goode came left, his flat, arrowed pass was plucked out of the air by Leon Lloyd who went the distance to score against his former club to a virtual deafening silence.

“That was the best pass I have had from Goodey in about 12 years,” Lloyd said afterwards. “I am staying at his house tonight – I hope he hasn’t kicked me out.

“When I played here for Leicester about 150-odd times, I think I only lost about five or six times so I know how hard it is to win here. It is a fantastic result for us in the long-term. It is something we can really build on.”

Goode did make partial amends with a 13th minute penalty but he was off target with three more first-half attempts and Walker made it 10-3 with a penalty after Leicester were penalised for over the top at a line-out drive.

When Gloucester kept it simple they were a handful and when Walker sized up his options from deep before dropping his shoulder and heading through a midfield gap, his raking kick caused serious problems and Leicester conceded a five metre scrum.

What followed was probably the game's turning point. Gloucester were conscious of Alex Moreno getting on the outside of Nieto at the engagement but when the pressure came from the Kingsholm pack, referee Roy Maybank awarded a penalty try that was about as popular as an Englishman in Sydney.

Walker nudged over the conversion and Gloucester were 20-3 ahead without having done a great deal.

That is how it stayed until the break, despite Goode's profligacy and although the lead was commanding, Gloucester will kick themselves after the re-start for failing to put the game immediately to bed.

They looked to have scored after 50 minutes when Anthony Allen flicked a midfield pass through his legs to the on-rushing Narraway. The number eight ate up the ground and fed James Bailey and the winger looked to have given a scoring pass to Buxton but the video referee ruled the ball had been kept up before Gloucester conceded a free-kick at their scrummage.

And then, when Gloucester turned over Leicester possession deep in their own half, the impressive Walker led the break before kicking long for Tom Varndell to chase. He conceded a line-out and replacement scrum-half Gareth Cooper got over the line but the pass was ruled forward.

In that time, Gloucester had to settle for a single Walker penalty and although comfortable in defence, the visitors then conceded when Tom Croft burst clear with 10 minutes to go.

It reduced the deficit to 23-10 but Gloucester then closed the game out with a third try. Again Walker, the eventual scorer, was instrumental. Leicester conceded a close-range line-out and the forwards kept the ball in a trundling, powerful maul before Walker escaped the cover to dive over.

He converted his own try to complete a personal haul of 20 points and take Gloucester to safety. There was still time for Matt Cornwell to grab a second Leicester score when he got past Narraway but it was too little too late as Gloucester's Premiership credentials received a massive rubber stamp.

Tigers Team

15. Geordan Murphy 14. John Murphy 13. Ollie Smith 12. Matt Cornwell 11. Tom Varndell 10. Andy Goode 9. Frank Murphy 1. Alex Moreno 2. Benjamin Kayser 3. Julian White 4. Louis Deacon 5. Marco Wentzel 6. Brett Deacon 7. Luke Abraham 8. Jordan Crane

16. Mefin Davies 17. Martin Castrogiovanni 18. Richard Blaze 19. Tom Croft 20. Ben Youngs 21. Paul Burke 22. Ayoola Erinle

Gloucester Rugby Team

15. Olly Morgan 14. Leon Lloyd 13. Mike Tindall 12. Anthony Allen 11. James Bailey 10. Willie Walker 9. Mike Prendergast 1. Patrice Collazo 2. Olivier Azam 3. Carlos Nieto 4. Peter Buxton 5. Alex Brown 6. Alasdair Strokosch 7. Andy Hazell 8. Luke Narraway

16. Andy Titterrell 17. Christian Califano 18. Nick Wood 19. Will James 20. Gareth Cooper 21. Ryan Lamb 22. Mark Foster

HT: 3 - 20

Attendance: 17,101

JC