

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2007

THREE-TRY GLOUCESTER MAKE IT FIVE IN A ROW

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 31 SALE SHARKS 12

If there is one thing that won't happen at Castle Grim this season under Dean Ryan it is that Gloucester won't get washed along with all the hype.

Despite a fifth successive Guinness Premiership victory that maintained their perfect start to the season, the Kingsholm head coach described the performance as the worst of the season. Please he wasn't right.

"I thought we were too individual, particularly in the first-half, and as an overall performance I thought it was our worst of the season," he said.

"In terms of the margin on the scoreboard it looks impressive but there are plenty of things to work on. When we operated as a collective unit in the second half, we were much better.

"We gave ourselves 20 minutes to hunt the bonus point but then went back to individualism and it cost us."

It was hard to disagree with his assessment. When Gloucester operated as a unit they were again impressive.

The set scrum was dynamic and punishing – crushing the Sharks at the set-piece in very much the same way Leicester were laid to waste last week.

There were times when it hardly seemed to matter who was on the field such as Gloucester's superiority and it pointed very strongly at what a competitive squad has been assembled at Kingsholm.

They also defended magnificently during Sale's one period of second half pressure. If there was a pointer towards the onrushing Heineken Cup it is that Gloucester will not be found wanting in the physicality stakes. Time after time they drove Sale back at the contact area – it was the defining part of the afternoon and the crowd loved it.

The work-rate of Will James, Luke Narryway, Peter Buxton and Nick Wood exemplified the solidarity and Sale found themselves starting all over again 20 yards closer to their own line. It was a serious statement of intent.

James was tremendous, carried ball in good areas and got through a mountain of work. But it was not a day for individuals – too often Gloucester sent one-out runners into a thicket of defenders, combinations huffed and puffed and there was little to recommend the first-half.

Sale, for all their stubbornness at the tackle area, were not disciplined enough and under so much pressure up front that it prevented Charlie Hodgson gaining the sort of platform he needs to operate from.

He was under pressure throughout and as a result, his goalkicking qualities deserted him. His first chance came after only five minutes when the Sharks burgled an early try. Gloucester defended aggressively against a line-out shove but when play came into a maul in midfield, Benoit Bourrust popped out of the back to sneak home under no pressure.

Inexplicably, Hodgson missed the conversion and Gloucester got going with a 12th minute Ryan Lamb penalty after hands in a ruck.

Lamb then nudged Gloucester 6-5 ahead following heavy carrying from Mike Tindall, Anthony Allen and a couple of fired inside passes from Lamb and when Sale were penalised for playing the ball off their feet, Lamb did the rest.

Narraway chased a Lamb kick across field and when Sale again infringed, Lamb knocked over the points. Narraway and Tindall were increasingly involved in much of Gloucester's better work and Lamb made it 12-5 with his fourth penalty after 37 minutes.

However, Sale hit back before the break with their second try. Ben Foden and Julien Laharrague combined down the left and the Frenchman was able to pick off Carlos Nieto in the defensive line before finding Oriel Ripol and he got away from Leon Lloyd and Ryan Lamb before touching down. Hodgson tied the scores with the conversion.

Sale lost Sean Cox after the re-start to the sinbin and it hit them badly. They had been ultra-competitive at the contact area but a man down, Gloucester took advantage. They drove the line-out infield and although the move appeared to be grinding to a halt, Wood played a lovely ball off the floor to Leon Lloyd, who slid home.

Two minutes later, Gloucester were in again. This time it was Allen who made the incision, carving up the centre before releasing Tindall and the centre was able to put Lloyd in for his third try in two games.

The double-whammy sent the hosts 24-12 ahead and in with a realistic chance of claiming a bonus point. The possibility came an almost certainty when they scored again with an hour on the clock.

Lamb kicked toward the open side and when the ball sat up incredibly, Iain Balshaw's Christmas's came all at once and he was able to send full-back Olly Morgan hurtling to the sticks.

It was now when the pressure should have told. Gloucester still held all the aces in the scrum and had defended very well but were let down late on. They looked to have scored a fourth try when Allen broke to the right but his pass towards Balshaw was called forward.

The move summed up Gloucester's afternoon: Some bits were very good, others ultimately frustrating.

Gloucester Team

15. Olly Morgan 14. Leon Lloyd 13. Mike Tindall 12. Anthony Allen
11. James Bailey 10. Ryan Lamb 9. Rory Lawson 1. Nick Wood
2. Andy Titterrell 3. Carlos Nieto 4. Will James 5. Alex Brown 6. Peter
Buxton 7. Alasdair Strokosch 8. Luke Narraway

16. Olivier Azam 17. Christian Califano 18. Marco Bortolami
19. Akapusi Qera 20. Mike Prendergast 21. Willie Walker 22. Iain
Balshaw

Sale Sharks Team

15. Ben Foden 14. Julien Laharrague 13. Rudi Keil 12. Elvis Seveali'i
11. Oriol Ripol Fortuny 10. Charlie Hodgson 9. Sililo Martens
1. Lionel Faure 2. Marc Jones 3. Benoit Bourrust 4. Dean Schofield
5. Sean Cox 6. Chris Jones 7. Magnus Lund 8. Genaro Fessia

16. Scott Lawson 17. Ben Evans 18. David Tait 19. Jason White
20. Richard Wigglesworth 21. Rhys Jones 22. Chris Bell

HT: 12 - 12

Attendance: 14,075

JC