

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2007**

**PERFECT START ENDED BY IRISH**

**LONDON IRISH 15 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 10**

Thanks to their most resourceful and well-executed performance of the season, London Irish ended Gloucester's unbeaten start in the Guinness Premiership with a scrappy but thoroughly deserved victory in Reading.

Blessed with unquenchable spirit, an excellent strategic kicking game and a whole host of full-on performances up front, Irish simply squeezed the life from Gloucester.

Gloucester did plenty of things pretty much right but the one thing they require above all else these days is quick ball from the contact areas and they simply failed to get it.

Irish flooded the breakdown with bodies, turned it into such a broken, messy and disjointed part of the game that Gloucester were unable to inject any momentum into the contest.

They also kicked well – Shane Geraghty pulling the strings to great effect from stand-off. They kept churning the ball in behind Gloucester's back three – often after only one or two phases and it was a tactic that worked a treat because it only added to the stop-start nature of the game, forcing Gloucester to chase and play from deep and denying them a foothold in the game.

Throw in a brilliant defensive line-out performance from Nick Kennedy and a scrum foundation that was never set to Gloucester's comfort, and all the ingredients were there for a contest low on entertainment but chock full of physicality, passion and determination.

There is no doubt Gloucester will feel aggrieved at certain areas of the game – the contact area and scrummage particularly – but that is to take nothing away from an Irish side who got to grips with the contest and controlled possession and territory for vast periods.

“You are only in the contest if you can impose your foundations on the game,” said head coach Dean Ryan. “We didn’t get the opportunity to play or have any field position and that didn’t change much in the second half.

“There wasn’t a fast ball or a ruck that didn’t have people all over it and that meant the scoreline was always going to be tight. There was no quick phase ball in the game and it meant we couldn’t move cohesively.

“Irish were pretty well thought out. They made sure it was scrappy and kept us looking for ball. Their line-out is good, I was bemused at the scrum and the breakdown became very static which meant we struggled to see where our game was coming from.

“We didn’t create any opportunities to score and in a tight game that was crucial.”

Irish went ahead after just three minutes when full-back Peter Hewat landed an angled penalty after Kennedy had been pulled down at a line-out. That was one area Irish got on top of early, piling the pressure on with their defensive qualities and the scavenging of Phil Murphy and Declan Danaher.

The hosts controlled so much of the opening half-hour that it was somewhat of a mystery they were only 3-0 up. Mike Prendergast had to get back quickly to recover possession after another neat kick from Seilala Mapusua.

And with bodies causing a pile-up at early tackle situation, Gloucester just couldn’t get moving. They lost Ryan Lamb to the sinbin in the 21st minute for a bit of pilfering at the breakdown when he tried to rob Keiran Roche and although it didn’t have an impact on the scoreboard, it hardly helped Gloucester’s chances of injecting something into the contest.

Gloucester's only first-half chance came via a penalty but Chris Paterson, on his debut, failed to find the target.

What Gloucester didn't need was a poor start to the second half but Irish provided it with a try that summed up their performance: They used good line-out ball up the centre – Delon Armitage carrying hard into the Gloucester defence. And when it came back to Geraghty, he angled a lovely little rolling kick in behind Gloucester's defence for Tomas De Vedia to score.

A 10-0 lead was a significant advantage given the tough, tense nature of the game but Gloucester responded almost immediately with a try.

Peter Buxton chased and caught a box kick brilliantly, Gloucester finally found some quick ball and when Prendergast came again to the left his little ball picked up James Bailey and he got away to Iain Balshaw.

Balshaw, hard working at full-back, chipped and chased his own kick, bumped Paul Hodgson out of the way and scored.

It dragged Gloucester back to 10-7 behind but it was not enough. There was still no avenue into the contest, the tackle area was a slow, laborious mess and to Irish's credit, they battled tooth and nail – a real kick-back from their defeat against Wasps.

David Paice was excellent, Bob Casey a totem of defiance. Gloucester had their warhorses too – Buxton, Patrice Collazo and Christian Califano – but it was hard going.

The score that settled the contest arrived with six minutes to go. Again it was from a Geraghty prod and although Topsy Ojo somehow dived completely over the ball, De Vedia touched down.

There was still time for a Paterson penalty and a couple of late charges from Olivier Azam but it was too late – Irish's will won the day.

## L Irish Team

15. Peter Hewat 14. Topsy Ojo 13. Delon Armitage 12. Seilala Mapusua  
11. Tomas De Vedia 10. Shane Geraghty 9. Paul Hodgson 1. Dan  
Murphy 2. David Paice 3. Tonga Lea'aetoa 4. Nick Kennedy 5. Bob  
Casey 6. Kieran Roche 7. Declan Danaher 8. Phil Murphy

16. Tom Warren 17. Danie Coetzee 18. Gary Johnson 19. Richard  
Thorpe 20. Steffon Armitage 21. Warren Fury 22. Jeremy Staunton

## Gloucester Rugby Team

15. Iain Balshaw 14. Chris Paterson 13. Mike Tindall 12. Anthony Allen  
11. James Bailey 10. Ryan Lamb 9. Mike Prendergast 1. Patrice Collazo  
2. Andy Titterrell 3. Christian Califano 4. Marco Bortolami 5. Alex  
Brown 6. Peter Buxton 7. Akapusi Qera 8. Luke Narryway

16. Olivier Azam 17. Alasdair Dickinson 18. Will James 19. Alasdair  
Strokosch 20. Rory Lawson 21. Willie Walker 22. Karl Pryce

HT: 3 - 0

Attendance: 7,582

JC