

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2007**

**FOUR-TRY GLOUCESTER STUNNED BY COMEBACK**

**LONDON WASPS 29 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 26**

Yet another remarkable match, yet another astonishing recovery from Wasps. For the thick end of an hour in this overtly physical, free-flowing, blood and thunder contest, Gloucester operated pretty much to their script.

They more than coped physically – no mean feat in itself against the Heineken Cup holders – they scored four tries of contrasting excellence, scrummaged their socks off and generally grabbed Wasps by the unmentionables and refused to let go – Lawrence Dallaglio and all.

But then it all, inexplicably, went to pot in a crazy last quarter that allowed the hosts to overturn a dead and buried 21-3 deficit into the most unlikely of 29-26 victories.

Gloucester's collective inability to win these sort of games is nothing new, which makes this defeat all the more difficult to stomach.

They cannot see these games to a close – it is not for the lack of talent or quality – but in the maelstrom they failed to see themselves to the finish line. Supremely organised by Rapheal Ibanez and driven on by a Herculean performance from replacement James Haskell, Wasps scored four tries in 27 minutes to revive their EDF Energy Cup campaign.

With skipper Peter Buxton in the cooler thanks to a needless yellow card after tapping the ball away from Simon Amor, Gloucester simply failed to cope with Wasps' pick and go game. They drove the ball tremendously, made plenty of ground and generally made a right mess of Gloucester's defence.

They also made the most of Gloucester's inability to retain control of the ball for long periods and there was a chilling inevitability of Wasps' winning score through Haskell.

So, where does this leave Gloucester on the eve of the Heineken Cup?

If they can recover mentally and physically from this in five days they have enough about them to take Ulster to the limits of endurance next Friday. Here, they scrummaged wonderfully well. Carlos Nieto is a diamond, Nick Wood so understated but equally as terrific and Olivier Azam seismic in his effort.

Alex Brown and Peter Buxton carried plenty of ball and the line-out operated well, while the back row trio cleared plenty of ball away from the contact area and tackled themselves to the standstill – one hit by Akapusi Qera on Rob Hoadley had the bones rattling in the dug-outs.

Gloucester also created plenty of chances, Olly Morgan was brilliant under the high ball, Iain Balshaw was a threat and Ryan Lamb mixed things up well to indicate there is plenty in the locker.

Thanks to some heavy carting from Brown and Wood, Gloucester went ahead after four minutes. Lamb was also involved and when Rory Lawson picked up at the base of a ruck, he darted through Wasps' defence to score.

It set the tone for the half. Gloucester were swift and fast thinking – shifting the emphasis of their attacks from long to short – and had James Simpson-Daniel taken Lamb's pass after 12 minutes, Gloucester would have been flying.

As it was, they had to wait until the 35th minute to go 14-0 ahead. Lamb and Lawson combined well and when the muscle was applied to a couple of searing drives, Azam was credited with the score under a heap of bodies.

Wasps did get on the board before the break when Danny Cipriani landed a penalty but Gloucester were in control. And that control got even greater seven minutes after the break with a third try.

Lamb's quality shone when he waited before sending Luke Narryway, hugely effective at number eight, through a midfield gap on the 22 metre line and although Cipriani got back to make the tackle, Lawson and Lamb combined and Simpson-Daniel gave the scoring pass to Morgan.

Home and hosed – so it would seem. Wasps, curiously quiet despite some lovely running from Paul Sackey and Cipriani – were finally raised from their slumbers. Tom Voyce was the first to score when he managed to brush through Simpson-Daniel's tackle following a brilliant piece of skill from Waters and went to the line.

If that raised the spirits around Adams Park then Gloucester's fourth try looked to have put the tin lid on a recovery. Narryway was found at the tail of a line-out and although Lamb's long, raking pass looked forward, Morgan gobbled it up and put Balshaw in at the corner to take Gloucester 26-8 ahead.

With 19 minutes remaining, Gloucester just needed cool heads and control – they managed neither. Ibanez marshalled the recovery brilliantly and Wasps cranked up the pressure in close quarters. Haskell was driven over to the left of the sticks following a series of seriously big drives and the momentum changed.

Buxton went to the bin and with 14 men, Gloucester simply crumbled under the pressure. They had their chances to cool it down, take the sting from the contest but they died in a fog of confusion entirely of their own making.

With Buxton off, Haskell, despite a stamp on Anthony Allen, simply grew in authority and he scored again after 71 to bring Wasps to within four points at 22-26 behind.

There was still time for Gareth Delve to make a brilliant tackle on Sackey after Hoadley's pass but the tide had turned totally now. Tom Rees, Haskell and Ibanez led the charge and when the French skipper peeled off a line-out catch, he arrived brilliantly to send John Hart in for the decisive score.

In the blink of an eye Gloucester's seemingly assured victory had gone up in smoke. If they fail to heed these lessons, so will their dreams in Europe.

HT: 3 - 14

Attendance: 7,802

JC