

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2007**

**SECOND HALF TRIES EARN VITAL WIN**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 26 OSPREYS 18**

As riotously physical as expected, as uncompromisingly full on as ever – Gloucester saw themselves to a hugely important Heineken Cup victory over the Ospreys at Kingsholm to take a giant leap forward in Pool Two.

Tries were shared two-apiece – Sonny Parker crossing twice for the Ospreys in the first-half and Anthony Allen and James Simpson-Daniel responding for Gloucester in the second in what was a thunderous occasion in front of 16,500 enthralled spectators.

This was tribalism at its very best. If not quite up there in the classic stakes, it was still a bruising battle throughout and Gloucester can thank their attacking power from turnover ball and ability to scrap like dogs on the floor for the victory because the Ospreys caused any number of first-half problems.

It was as if the home side had been caught up in the build up because they conceded two soft first-half tries that were in direct contrast to the rest of the game.

But by the end there were signals that this side, despite its relative lack of age, is maturing through experience in this competition. Gloucester simply shut the game out as quickly as it looked possible for the Ospreys to respond – retaining the ball in much the same way as Agen did on this very ground last season.

And by preventing the Ospreys gaining a bonus point, established a very nice little cushion at the top of the pool that may well become crucial.

Gloucester were asked to defend stoutly for the first five minutes, soaking up a great deal of pressure and when they retained possession looked to go from deep. However, Mike Tindall's pass was horridly awkward towards Iain Balshaw who was unable to take the pass under pressure and Parker scored following good work from Nikki Walker and James Hook.

Ryan Lamb did shave the deficit three minutes later but from the re-start Gloucester were back-peddling – Balshaw forced into a brilliant try-saving tackle to deny Jonathan Vaughton after the Ospreys had steamed through thanks to Gavin Henson.

It was a worrying sign – with Marty Holah, the brilliant Mike Phillips and the ferocious Filo Tiatia making considerable inroads Gloucester had to defend for long periods without the ball.

With a little more precision, the Ospreys could have opened up a sizeable lead but thanks to the likes to Alasdair Strokosch, the massively impressive Luke Narraway and Peter Buxton, Gloucester had enough about them to get into Holah and Co. on the deck.

Lamb made it 6-7 with his second penalty before the Ospreys finally scored again. The scampering strides of Holah made ground up the middle, Phillips kept the whole thing shifting along and Parker brushed off Carlos Nieto and Allen to score far too easily – despite the best efforts of Tindall.

At this stage it was touch and go – another Ospreys score would have blown the thing wide open but Gloucester sat in, waited for their opportunity and kept nicking three points. Lamb shaved another trio off the scoreline with his third penalty before the break and then came the first critical moment of the second half.

Although the Ospreys had the ball, Gloucester turned them over deep inside their own half, Buxton fed Allen and the centre cut back against the grain of the Ospreys' defence to blast clear and have enough pace to get ahead of Phillips to score. Kingsholm went potty.

Lamb nudged the conversion and Gloucester were 16-12 ahead. But this wouldn't be Gloucester without the odd palpitation and Hook nudged the visitors back ahead with penalties after 45 and 55 minutes – the second with Nieto in the sinbin.

Despite all their fire and vigour, there were plenty of signs the Ospreys may not close the game out and when Hook's high kick was missed by Rory Lawson, Balshaw started the move that swung the match.

He ran back hard, linked with Tindall and the England centre sent Simpson-Daniel racing to the line for the second try. Chris Paterson, on for Lamb, landed the extras and Gloucester were 23-18 ahead entering the final quarter.

It was now the likes of Narraway, naturally a running ball player, came into their own at the breakdown. Gloucester went every inch on the floor – Strokosch, Nick Wood and Gareth Delve all ploughing through buckets of work for the cause.

In the physical stakes, Gloucester were every bit as good against the likes of Holah and it remained somewhat of a mystery why Hale T Pole did emerge from the bench to add fresh impetus. As it was, the lessons Gloucester suffered in the name of development shone through in the closing stages – they retained the ball, wound the clock down and froze the Ospreys out.

This might not have been a riveting classic everyone was hoping for but in terms of thrills and spills, guts and determination, this was Heineken Cup rugby in the raw and Gloucester are more than able to cope.

#### Gloucester Team

15. Iain Balshaw 14. James Simpson-Daniel 13. Mike Tindall  
12. Anthony Allen 11. Lesley Vainikolo 10. Ryan Lamb 9. Rory Lawson  
1. Nick Wood 2. Olivier Azam 3. Carlos Nieto 4. Peter Buxton 5. Marco Bortolami 6. Alasdair Strokosch 7. Akapusi Qera 8. Luke Narraway

16. Andy Titterrell 17. Christian Califano 18. Will James 19. Gareth Delve 20. Mike Prendergast 21. Chris Paterson 22. Olly Morgan

Ospreys Team

15. Lee Byrne 14. Nikki Walker 13. Sonny Parker 12. Gavin Henson  
11. Jonny Vaughton 10. James Hook 9. Mike Phillips 1. Duncan Jones  
2. Huw Bennett 3. Adam Jones 4. Ian Gough 5. Ian Evans 6. Jonathan  
Thomas 7. Marty Holah 8. Filo Tiatia

16. Richard Hibbard 17. Paul James 18. Alun-Wyn Jones 19. Hale  
T-Pole 20. Justin Marshall 21. Shaun Connor 22. Mark Taylor

HT: 9 - 12

Attendance: 16,500

JC