

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2007

DELVE'S TRY SINKS DRAGONS

DRAGONS 11 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 13

In the wilds of Newport, Gloucester ended their EDF Energy Cup campaign with a narrow victory – based on unyielding effort and a couple of outstanding individual contributions.

Against the back-drop of continuous driving rain that made any sort of constructive rugby an impossibility and a playing surface so saturated that a mistake was likely to decide the game, Gareth Delve scored Gloucester's decisive try in the final two minutes from a driving scrum to snatch victory.

However, the victory will be overshadowed by injuries to skipper Marco Bortolami, who looked to have damaged a calf, and to Andy Hazell, who limped off with a twisted knee. The severity of both injuries will be known tomorrow but they were bad points on an otherwise satisfying evening.

The star for Gloucester was Delve. In conditions that reduced even the best athletes to their components parts, his all-round carrying game, work rate off the back of the scrum and defensive qualities stood out like a beacon.

Gloucester needed all his drive and endeavour because for long periods it looked as though the Dragons may just nick it. They reduced Gloucester's lineout to a slithering mess thanks to the efforts of the excellent Adam Jones and got stuck in at the tackle area, where Nic Fitisemanu carried hard.

It was a test of Gloucester's all-round composure and togetherness that they managed to get through it – but they trailed until the very end.

There were some good performances however. Both James Bailey and Mark Foster were tested under the high ball and stood up well, Willie Walker mixed things up in the number 10 position and Hazell plundered away until he was forced off.

There was precious little in it in the first-half and had the Dragons played slightly more when Ceri Sweeney had possession, the story may have been different.

The scores were locked at 3-3 when – Walker and Sweeney swapping penalties – before the hosts took an 8-3 lead with the first try. Sweeney kicked through behind Gloucester's defence and Mike Prendergast was forced to kick the ball dead.

From the scrum – one that didn't go on the deck – the Dragons kept the ball long enough for prop Adam Black to be driven over for the score.

The contest was as close as that – the conditions ruling the roost – and it was a testament to both teams that they made as few mistakes as they did. Gloucester started the second half in much mood[*sic*].

They got going in the forwards and when Jeremy Paul, experiencing such conditions for the first time, linked well with Hazell, the Dragons were penalised for off-side and Walker cut the gap to 8-6.

It was developing into a classic little battle. The forwards traded blow after blow up front – Delve leading the way for Gloucester as they dominated possession and territory for long periods but were unable to break what was a very committed Dragons defence.

They added extra impetus when Christian Califano was thrown into action but it looked as though the Dragons would nail a cherished victory when Sweeney landed a 60th minute penalty.

Paul Emerick chased after Andy Williams' kick and when Foster's clearance was charged down, Gloucester were penalised for killing the ball.

And when the resulting scrum again collapsed, Sweeney nudged over the penalty to make it 11-6.

However, there was always the chance Gloucester may just engineer a chase to score themselves. Olly Morgan produced a brilliant break down the left and with the momentum changing, Bailey got on the outside before kicking behind Emerick.

Will James charged through and charged down Sweeney's kick and from the scrum, Gloucester got the shove on and Delve was driven over to score.

Chris Paterson, on for Walker, duly added the extras to take Gloucester ahead and then the visitors spent the best part of three minutes shutting the game out by simply retaining possession.

Although counting for nothing in the competition, it was another exceptionally important victory for Gloucester and means they will regroup for their pivotal trip to Bourgoin next week in good shape and even better heart.

Dragons Team

15. Paul Emerick 14. Richard Fussell 13. Rhodri Gomer Davies
12. Gareth Maule 11. Richard Mustoe 10. Ceri Sweeney 9. Andy Williams
1. Adam Black 2. Ben Daly 3. Gethin Robinson 4. Adam Jones
5. Peter Sidoli 6. Joe Bearman 7. Jamie Ringer 8. Nic Fitisemanu

16. Steve Jones 17. Hugh Gustafson 18. Andrew Hall 19. Lewis Evans
20. Phil Dollman 21. Aled Thomas 22. Wayne Evans

Gloucester Rugby Team

15. Olly Morgan 14. James Bailey 13. Leon Lloyd 12. Ali James
11. Mark Foster 10. Willie Walker 9. Mike Prendergast 1. Alasdair Dickinson
2. Jeremy Paul 3. Jack Forster 4. Will James 5. Marco Bortolami
6. Alasdair Strokosch 7. Andy Hazell 8. Gareth Delve

16. Andy Titterrell 17. Christian Califano 18. Alex Brown 19. Luke Narraway 20. Gareth Cooper 21. Chris Paterson 22. James Simpson-Daniel

HT: 8 - 3

Attendance: 4,576

JC