

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, JANUARY 26, 2008

LAMB KICKS GLOUCESTER TO PRICELESS VICTORY

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 18 LONDON WASPS 17

Down Gloucester way there are victories that matter and then there are victories like this over Wasps.

Gloucester scavenged and scraped, tackled and harassed their way to a crucial four points – holding out a ferocious second half recovery from Wasps that yielded two tries in a remarkable effort that almost snatched victory for the reigning Heineken Cup champions.

If anything, the victory should tell Gloucester they can beat these battle hardened sides who are capable of stretching the laws to the limit, who maximise their opportunities and bring a level of physicality that stacks up with anything in Europe.

It wasn't a classic but if you like your rugby red raw, nervy and full of passion, this was just the thing for you.

Although there was nothing dazzling – a couple of James Simpson-Daniel breaks apart and a frantic Wasps turn-over – there was enough going on at the sharp end to transfix the majority in a sold out Kingsholm and with the likes of Will James, Andy Hazell, Carlos Nieto and Luke Narryaway battering away, Gloucester had enough in the tanks to close the game out.

Gloucester are still plagued by the same old problems – ill-advised offloads here, a missed tackle there and an inability to seal the game when on top – but it is impossible to question their work ethic, second half defensive power and forward effort because it was quite staggering.

There is no doubt Wasps will have their grievances because they were as competitive as ever but simply gave away too many penalties at crucial times and were also hampered by some wayward kicking from Danny Cipriani.

Tackles reigned in on Phil Vickery, Lawrence Dallaglio and all and from the offences Ryan Lamb kicked the points. The first was when a scrum disintegrated and the second when scrum-half Mark McMillan came off-side to take Gloucester 6-0 ahead.

However, Wasps were on the board immediately from the re-start when Narraway came off-side after James couldn't hold the kick and Cipriani landed his one and only first-half effort.

There was nothing in it – one tackle from Hazell on Tom Rees at a line-out emphasised the stinging nature of the contest – and when Dallaglio was pinged for diving on the ball at a ruck Lamb made it 9-3 with his third successful penalty.

Wasps were asked to defend for a long period and they lost James Haskell to the sinbin when he prevented Narraway playing the ball after Gloucester launched an attack from a scrum that involved a break from Simpson-Daniel.

The exhausting nature of the contest was already picking up casualties – Mike Tindall suffered a blow to the ribs and Hazell did remarkably well to get through his first game since November as both teams traded blow after blow.

But with Narraway carrying hard, Simpson-Daniel posing a threat from outside centre and a scrum operating at maximum temperature thanks to the front row trio, Gloucester did create their chances and Iain Balshaw was held up just short on the left and Wasps lost Tom Palmer to the bin for killing the ball.

From the penalty, Lamb made it 12-3 and it stayed that way until three minutes into the second half when Lamb kicked another long-range penalty to make it 15-3 – and in theory make the contest safe.

Gloucester really should have killed the game off now – a brilliant break involving Narraway, Olivier Azam and then Simpson-Daniel should have ended with a try but Wasps scrambled brilliantly despite some tremendous carrying from James and Nick Wood – who had another belter at the set-piece.

To their enormous credit, Wasps took everything Gloucester could throw at them and then promptly went the length to score the opening try.

Gloucester lost Lamb to the sinbin and when Wasps kicked a penalty to the corner, replacement hooker James Buckland scored very neatly down the short side of the line-out. Cipriani converted and Wasps trailed 18-10 and the game was very much still alive.

Very much alive became positively throbbing when Wasps scored again. Cipriani's wayward kick caught Willie Walker in the headlights and neither he nor James Bailey could prevent Wasps turning over possession.

They master-minded a series of powerful drives that stretched Gloucester's defence to the limit and when Vickery clattered into midfield, Haskell fed Dominic Waldouck and he slid on an outside break past the cover and over for the second try.

Cipriani did the rest and Gloucester's game-safe lead had been cut to a single point. It could have gone either way now but the home-town forwards started to carry straight and hard. They prevented Wasps getting in at the side and slowly but surely shut the game out.

With the noise rising as Gloucester monopolised the ball late in the game, the likes of the remarkable Peter Buxton, James, Hazell, Gareth Delve and Alasdair Strokosch shut the game down and with Gareth Cooper providing fresh legs at scrum-half the home side grabbed all four points – and what a four points they were.

Gloucester Team

15. Willie Walker 14. Iain Balshaw 13. James Simpson-Daniel 12. Mike Tindall 11. James Bailey 10. Ryan Lamb 9. Rory Lawson 1. Nick Wood 2. Olivier Azam 3. Carlos Nieto 4. Peter Buxton 5. Will James 6. Luke Narraway 7. Andy Hazell 8. Gareth Delve

16. Jeremy Paul 17. Patrice Collazo 18. Dan Tuohy 19. Alasdair Strokosch 20. Gareth Cooper 21. Anthony Allen 22. Mark Foster

London Wasps Team

15. Josh Lewsey 14. Rob Hoadley 13. Fraser Waters 12. Dominic Waldouck 11. David Doherty 10. Danny Cipriani 9. Mark McMillan 1. Tim Payne 2. Joe Ward 3. Phil Vickery 4. Tom Palmer 5. George Skivington 6. James Haskell 7. Tom Rees 8. Lawrence Dallaglio

16. James Buckland 17. Nick Adams 18. Richard Birkett 19. John Hart 20. Simon Amor 21. Dave Walder 22. Dan Leo

HT: 12 - 3

Attendance: 16,200

JC