

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2008

TIGERS EDGE KINGSHOLM THRILLER

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 13 LEICESTER TIGERS 20

When Gloucester last lost a Premiership game at Kingsholm the likes of Ryan Lamb and Anthony Allen were barely out of short trousers but the emphatic feeling of euphoria that swept through Kingsholm that afternoon heralded a bright new dawn.

On that day back in 2006, Wasps took the points but Gloucester the plaudits and the development cycle has continued in an upward curve ever since.

The feeling may not exactly be the same this time but if this was an image of what Gloucester can produce under the severest of circumstances then they can once again feel very positive about life.

By the end of an enthralling contest against the reigning Premiership champions Gloucester put an international-quality pack through the ringer and asked so many questions of Aaron Mauger, Ollie Smith and Tom Varndell out-wide that it was to Leicester's huge [credit] they wound the clock down so effectively.

It was a cracking match – Gloucester's movement came up against Leicester's kicking and strike policy from set-phase and if this is what they can produce without 17 regular players then they are in good hands.

Only the outcome went against them because for the most part they operated exactly how they would have liked. They were energised, physical, and stayed in shape. It was a day the likes of Jack Adams, on loan at Moseley this season, slotted in magnificently in place of Mike Tindall. There was almost nothing splitting his contribution to that of the celebrated All Black Aaron Mauger.

James Bailey was on the money at full-back, Willie Walker showed all his footballing expertise and some outstanding goalkicking from stand-off and Peter Buxton, Will James, Andy Hazell and Olivier Azam fronted Gloucester's forward effort.

As the temperature rose in the frantic closing stages, Gloucester almost snatched a draw. Walker's delicate little chip landed in the hands of James Simpson-Daniel but John Murphy and Ayoola Erinle got back brilliantly to save a certain try. It was one of those matches.

Leicester also lost flanker Ben Herring to a red card for his second yellow card offence when Gareth Cooper launched through but as he wasn't in the act of scoring it was impossible to award a penalty try.

The temperature rose as early as the sixth minute when Azam and Tigers prop Alex Moreno got rather too close for comfort and it invigorated Gloucester. James and Adam Balding both carried ball and Simpson-Daniel slalomed through midfield gaps off his wing.

Walker was involved in most of Gloucester's good things and when Hazell raced onto his little chip, Leicester had to scramble to prevent a certain home score. Gloucester could have done with something here because there was no doubt they were on top but Leicester's all-round mastery of the grim and grotty kept the hosts at bay.

For that they could be thankful for a workaholic performance from Jordan Crane, plenty of vigour from Martin Corry and Herring's nuisance value on the deck. They slowly emerged from their defensive organisation to open the scoring with their first strike from set-piece.

Andy Goode took possession from a line-out and fed Tom Varndell, in off his wing. With the extra man, Smith scored very neatly outside Bailey after 35 minutes.

It was a lovely score and Goode added the extras with an excellent touchline conversion for a 7-0 lead. Walker did cut the gap to 7-3 before the break with a penalty.

After the break it was Gloucester's turn to up the temperature and they took the lead with the old one-two from a line-out. Walker may have opted to kick for goal but instead drove his kick into the corner. Gloucester's line-out has not been a thing of beauty for some time but Azam located Buxton at the front and he duly popped a pass back to the hooker, who bundled over.

This time it was Walker's turn to land the most difficult of conversions from the touchline and Gloucester were 10-7 ahead. It was all panning out quite nicely at this stage but what Gloucester could not find was another score immediately that may have broken the contest open.

As it was, Goode levelled matters with a penalty for off-side and although Walker snuck Gloucester ahead 13-10 inside the last quarter, Goode drew the side's level again with a 65th minute penalty for hands in a ruck.

The contest was anybody's at this stage. Gloucester had shown enough to indicate they may have it in them to score again but it was the Tigers who struck from another set-piece.

They controlled a scrum inside their own half and Goode's break found Mauger on a lovely angled run that took him beyond Gloucester's first line of defence. With the cover converging, he was able to locate Erinle on a brilliant diagonal run that took him outside Mark Foster and away from Hazell for the score.

Goode nudged over the extras and the Tigers were a converted try ahead with time ebbing away. But Gloucester showed great tenacity in the closing stages. Twice Hazell bludgeoned through the line, Simpson-Daniel had a dart and Leicester were forced onto the back foot.

With a series of red-hot scrummages pushing the Tigers back, Herring was red carded for preventing Gareth Cooper playing the ball from a quick penalty and then Murphy got back brilliantly to deny Simpson-Daniel, while Foster could not control a pass late on in the far left corner. Ultimately, it was not to be – but that should not detract from the all-round contribution of Gloucester's performance.

Gloucester Team

15. James Bailey 14. James Simpson-Daniel 13. Jack Adams
12. Anthony Allen 11. Mark Foster 10. Willie Walker 9. Rory Lawson
1. Nick Wood 2. Olivier Azam 3. Jack Forster 4. Peter Buxton 5. Will
James 6. Alasdair Strokosch 7. Andy Hazell 8. Adam Balding

16. Jeremy Paul 17. Alasdair Dickinson 18. Jonathan Pendlebury
19. Andy Titterrell 20. Gareth Cooper 21. Ali James 22. Charlie
Sharples

Leicester Tigers Team

15. Johnne Murphy 14. Tom Varndell 13. Ayoola Erinle 12. Aaron
Mauger 11. Ollie Smith 10. Andy Goode 9. Christophe Laussucq
1. Marcos Ayerza 2. George Chuter 3. Alex Moreno 4. Tom Croft
5. Marco Wentzel 6. Martin Corry 7. Ben Herring 8. Jordan Crane

16. Benjamin Kayser 17. David Young 18. Greg Gillanders 19. Brett
Deacon 20. Frank Murphy 21. Ian Humphreys 22. Sam Vesty

HT: 3 - 7

Attendance: 12,597

JC