

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2008

SIMPSON-DANIEL INSPIRES GLOUCESTER COMEBACK

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 28 NEWCASTLE FALCONS 20

Nervous, and driven to distraction by Newcastle's all-court approach, Gloucester rescued themselves with three tries in the last quarter to salvage four vital Guinness Premiership points.

This is a team that don't do things by half. The misery they encountered against Bristol last week was virtually all of their own making and it had a visible hangover in a performance that at times threatened very good things but also lurched alarmingly.

It was an exceedingly good job they had a man of James Simpson-Daniel's calibre at their disposal because he was quite probably the difference between the teams – the one authentically frightening attacking threat on either side. He has been running hot for a number of weeks now and not only did he present a cutting edge but a distributional quality also.

Newcastle's director of rugby John Fletcher went as far as to say he is amazed England continue to ignore him and on this evidence he has a very strong case.

It was Simpson-Daniel's try – somewhat of a walk-in – with 17 minutes remaining that breathed energy into Gloucester's fight-back because for the best part of an hour they could not fathom Newcastle at all and were taken to the limits of their physicality.

Because they were without their internationals they played open and loose and it worked a dream. Ollie Phillips, who had such a big game in the EDF Energy Cup, was instrumental to their efforts, Steve Jones did a manful job at stand-off and their forwards stacked up a real treat.

Carl Hayman has galvanised them up front but here it was the likes of Ben Woods, Phil Dowson and Mark Sorenson that produced the bullets for Jones to fire and they did it brilliantly.

Gloucester were nervous and out of kilter. The line-out has been an issue for some time and again it lurched alarmingly. They also struggled on the deck and it was not until Olivier Azam and Akapusi Qera arrived late on that the energy levels changed in the contact area. Ryan Lamb tried his socks off but looked rusty following his shoulder injury and it affected Gloucester's approach.

They did lead 6-0 thanks to two Willie Walker penalties after weathering a frantic Newcastle start and once they achieved quick ball the likes of Simpson-Daniel and Jack Adams – again wonderfully energetic in the centre – looked more than a handful and when they couldn't score, Newcastle burst the game open with a try three minutes before the break.

Gareth Cooper was turned over deep in Newcastle territory, Phillips kicked long with nobody at home for Gloucester. He won the foot race with Lamb and although Walker got back to the ball, the Newcastle man somehow stripped them both of possession and went beneath the sticks for the try.

If it shocked Gloucester they didn't show it – they didn't have time before Newcastle scored again. Hayman and Dowson were involved in a move before Tom May threaded through Gloucester's defence and behind the posts for the try.

He converted his own score to make it 14-9 at the break and when May landed a 46th minute penalty and then a drop-goal after Lee Dickson's quickly taken tap penalty and a lovely break by Jones got Newcastle within the strike zone again.

Gloucester were 11 points behind now and facing the prospect of a third straight Premiership defeat before they stirred them into action.

It started in strange fashion. Mark Foster hared after his own high kick and did brilliantly to win possession back for Gloucester. Cooper and Lamb combined and when Adams collected Lamb's long ball and straightened, he fed out to Simpson-Daniel, who dotted down.

The temperature was rising now. Gloucester found their range at the contact area – thanks to Azam's power – and they got through the gain like with the likes of Peter Buxton, Andy Hazell and Nick Wood in the thick of it.

To Newcastle's credit, they defended brilliantly after wave after wave of Gloucester attacks – Walker stepped inside the cover to reach the posts, Simpson-Daniel had a go to the right, Hazell carried forward and Gloucester poured all over Newcastle and when possession came to the left, Hazell sent replacement James Bailey in at the corner that took the home side 21-20 ahead.

Gloucester had seven minutes to maintain their advantage and wound the clock down with a series of drives before turning over the ball with a minute to go. Newcastle had one last chance and ran the ball to the left before May attempted a drop-goal that Narraway charged down.

The number eight picked up possession and made ground before off-loading to Akapusi Qera, who sealed the win with a third try.

It was as close as the scoreline suggested and Gloucester can be hugely thankful they produced the comeback they did.

Gloucester Team

15. Willie Walker 14. James Simpson-Daniel 13. Jack Adams
12. Anthony Allen 11. Mark Foster 10. Ryan Lamb 9. Gareth Cooper
1. Nick Wood 2. Andy Titterrell 3. Jack Forster 4. Will James 5. Alex Brown 6. Peter Buxton 7. Andy Hazell 8. Luke Narraway

16. Olivier Azam 17. Christian Califano 18. Jonathan Pendlebury
19. Akapusi Qera 20. Mike Prendergast 21. Ali James 22. James Bailey

Newcastle Falcons Team

15. Tom May 14. Ollie Phillips 13. Tom Dillon 12. Alex Tait 11. John Rudd 10. Steve Jones 9. Lee Dickson 1. Joe McDonnell 2. Matt Thompson 3. Carl Hayman 4. Andy Perry 5. Mark Sorenson 6. Geoff Parling 7. Ben Woods 8. Phil Dowson

16. Andy Long 17. David Wilson 18. Tim Swinson 19. Brent Wilson 20. James Grindal 21. Joe Shaw 22. Tim Visser

HT: 9 - 14

Attendance: 13,047

JC