

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**FRIDAY, MARCH 14, 2008**

**GLOUCESTER SALVAGE VITAL POINT**

**SALE SHARKS 22 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 16**

Gloucester dragged every ounce of effort they could muster to rescue a vital point against Sale Sharks.

Up against the mastery of Charlie Hodgson's kicking game, the international class of Luke McAlister and goodness knows how much grunt and gristle up front, Gloucester stuck to their task superbly to earn a penalty try with the final play of the contest.

Just how important this point may prove to be is too early to say but the six they have collected in the past week take on monumental significance when you consider what they faced against London Irish and then again here.

They had a back three playing out of position, an 18-year-old on the wing and by the end another in the centre. When the likes of Ryan Lamb and Anthony Allen are the senior heads in a three-quarter line then the whole kindergarten nature of Gloucester's make-up becomes apparent.

But neither Charlie Sharples or Henry Trinder looked out of place and considering the way Hodgson moved about Mark Foster and James Bailey that was some achievement. But both Foster and Bailey stuck to their jobs brilliantly and aided by a superlative performance from Allen and golden nugget contributions from the likes of Andy Hazell, Peter Buxton and Will James, Gloucester took much of Sale's physicality out of the game.

And had they not lost Dan Tuohy to the sinbin in the third quarter, the hosts may not have built up a lead that was decisive.

It was only then that Hodgson and the brilliant Ben Foden came alive and when the full-back picked a lovely angled run past Leon Lloyd after 57 minutes, Gloucester's world looked bleak.

But they showed tremendous stickability and with Christian Califano relishing a cameo in the scrum, Gloucester drove Sale back three times to earn a penalty try and a point they deserved.

Considering Sale were virtually at full strength and the likes of Sebastien Chabal, Ignacio Fernandez-Lobbe and Sebastien Bruno were in full war paint, the hosts only led 9-6 at the break – Hodgson's three penalties cancelling out two from Willie Walker.

The first period was a strange affair – the two significant line breaks both came from Gloucester. The first when Allen showed great strength to bounce his way through heavy traffic before kicking ahead and the second when Foster motored in off his wing but lost the ball to a Sale hand.

Sale's best moments came from McAlister but he felt the full force of Hazell and Allen as neither side created anything of much significance, despite Sale's territorial dominance.

However, when Hodgson nudged over a penalty and then a 49th minute drop-goal to go 15-6 ahead, Gloucester were up against it despite their brilliant defence, huge work rate and sheer ability to scrap for their lives.

The contest changed when Tuohy was sent to the cooler for killing the ball and with Hodgson to the fore, Sale maintained a series of attacks before Foden burst clear.

Gloucester had little option now but to chance their arm and give it a go. They lost some shape and structure but it was impossible to question their work ethic and desire. With Lamb on at stand-off and Luke Narryway adding bulk and carrying qualities from number eight, there was always a chance the visitors may snatch something.

Sale attempted to wind the clock down but when they coughed up the ball in the middle of the field and conceded a penalty for off-side, Lamb kicked to the corner. Sale defended the line-out drive but conceded a scrum. With Califano in vintage form alongside Jeremy Paul and Jack Forster, Gloucester shunted forward.

Sale lost Chris Jones when he came around the side to try and steal the ball and at the third time of asking, Gloucester crashed onward again and as Sale collapsed, referee Dave Pearson went under the sticks.

Walker nudged over the conversion with the last kick of the game to rescue a point – a point that may well prove to be hugely telling in the weeks to come.

#### Sharks Team

15. Ben Foden 14. Elvis Seveali'i 13. Luke McAlister 12. Chris Bell 11. Oriol Ripol Fortuny 10. Charlie Hodgson 9. Sililo Martens 1. Lionel Faure 2. Sebastien Bruno 3. Stuart Turner 4. Ignacio Fernandez Lobbe 5. Sean Cox 6. Chris Jones 7. Juan Martin Fernandez Lobbe 8. Sebastien Chabal

16. Neil Briggs 17. Eifion Roberts 18. Dean Schofield 19. Magnus Lund 20. Will Cliff 21. Lee Thomas 22. Chris Mayor

#### Gloucester Rugby Team

15. James Bailey 14. Charlie Sharples 13. Leon Lloyd 12. Anthony Allen 11. Mark Foster 10. Willie Walker 9. Gareth Cooper 1. Nick Wood 2. Andy Titterrell 3. Jack Forster 4. Dan Tuohy 5. Will James 6. Peter Buxton 7. Andy Hazell 8. Akapusi Qera

16. Jeremy Paul 17. Christian Califano 18. Jonathan Pendlebury 19. Luke Narryaway 20. Mike Prendergast 21. Ryan Lamb 22. Henry Trinder

HT: 9 - 6

Attendance: 9,266