

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, MARCH 29, 2008

DELPORT'S TRY STUNS GLOUCESTER

WORCESTER WARRIORS 17 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 14

Thinus Delport delivered another telling blow to Gloucester's Guinness Premiership title surge – by sliding in to score against his former employers in the final minute at Sixways.

The full-back was virtually all alone on the left and collected Miles Benjamin's flicked overhead pass to deliver the knockout punch in an absorbing but low quality M5 dose of derby mayhem.

His score sent the home crowd wild and it mattered not that Shane Drahm missed the conversion because Delport's touchdown came with less than 50 seconds remaining and there was not even enough time to re-start the game.

It handed Gloucester their sixth successive away defeat – a wholly depressing sequence – and the Warriors their first Premiership win over the Kingsholm club.

Quite how Gloucester let this slip will be something of a mystery – and potentially deeply troubling ahead of their Heineken Cup quarter-final against Munster next weekend – because after a rocky first quarter they controlled the ebb and flow of the contest throughout but were unable to put the game away.

When you consider they had control of both possession and territory with a line-out deep in Worcester waters with three minutes to go but ended up underneath their own sticks tells its own story. They coughed up ball in midfield and Drahm's kick towards the left bounced on its end into the arms of Sam Tuitupou.

He carried forward before kicking in behind Gloucester's retreating defence and James Simpson-Daniel carried the ball over to concede a five metre scrum from which Delport scored.

Gloucester's troubles therefore stemmed from their game management in the horrendous conditions. Any meaningful or coherent rugby was rendered virtually impossible thanks to the driving rain and swirling wind but having got in front before the break, they really should have shut the match down.

There was always the possibility that their inability to do so would cost them and it did.

Worcester started like a train – a ferocious start was virtually guaranteed from them – and when the pocket rocket Tuitupou collected Pat Sanderson's pass with 50 seconds gone he put his head down and reached the sticks to score after Gloucester had turned the ball over.

The hosts were by far the better in the opening exchanges. They mugged Gloucester's line-out once or twice and with Sanderson, scrum-half Matt Powell and Tuitupou all linking play well, Gloucester had to defend well to keep them out again.

If Worcester had scored again here the game may well have taken on a different shape but they had to wait until the second quarter for their next try but it was worth the wait.

Powell looped round off a scrum, Tuitupou, in full war paint, held possession up in midfield, Powell fed Delport who kicked forward and Marcel Garvey shot onto the ball before putting Benjamin away to the posts and he scored at the second attempt.

Considering the conditions it was a very good score and it stirred Gloucester into action. Alex Brown started pilfering Worcester line-out ball, Akapusi Qera – probably Gloucester's stand-out forward – turned over possession on the deck and Luke Narraway got into his stride.

And from their first real attack they cut the deficit. Iain Balshaw made a slashing break towards the posts and when Worcester couldn't escape their own half, Rory Lawson fed Anthony Allen, Simpson-Daniel came in to support and he found Lesley Vainikolo who brushed off Delport and slammed through Garvey to score his eighth try of the season.

Garvey was replaced by Rico Gear following the incident and Worcester suddenly lost their momentum. Gloucester were the team in charge now and when Narraway bundled up through a ruck, Andy Titterrell was used off short passes and Lamb looked to mix things up. Worcester were on the back foot.

Gloucester maintained possession long enough to the right of the posts before Lawson shot through a gap and slid home to score. Lamb's conversion took the visitors 14-12 ahead at the break.

The fact not a great deal happened in the second half was probably down to Gloucester's inability to score a third try. Had they done so, it would have surely shut out the game and the contest swayed from heavily contested line-outs and scrums, a mixed assortment of kicking games and a lack of chances.

Gloucester did look to pin Worcester down once Willie Walker was on at stand-off and as time ebbed away there was a chance they may nick it with the skin of their teeth.

Both teams defended superbly and in the contact area they both made mistakes but it was not until Delport's finish against his former club that the contest was settled – and it will be a mystery to Gloucester how they let this one escape them.

Worcester Team

15. Thinus Delport 14. Marcel Garvey 13. Dale Rasmussen 12. Sam Tuitupou 11. Miles Benjamin 10. Shane Drahm 9. Matt Powell 1. Tony Windo 2. Aleki Lutui 3. Tevita Taumoepeau 4. Greg Rawlinson 5. Craig Gillies 6. Tom Wood 7. Pat Sanderson 8. Kai Horstmann

16. Darren Morris 17. Matt Mullan 18. Will Bowley 19. Drew Hickey 20. Joe Carlisle 21. Johnny Arr 22. Rico Gear

Gloucester Rugby Team

15. Olly Morgan 14. Iain Balshaw 13. James Simpson-Daniel
12. Anthony Allen 11. Lesley Vainikolo 10. Ryan Lamb 9. Rory Lawson
1. Nick Wood 2. Andy Titterrell 3. Carlos Nieto 4. Marco Bortolami
5. Alex Brown 6. Alasdair Strokosch 7. Akapusi Qera 8. Luke Narryay

16. Jeremy Paul 17. Alasdair Dickinson 18. Will James 19. Gareth Delves
20. Gareth Cooper 21. Chris Paterson 22. Willie Walker

HT: 12 - 14

Attendance: 10,197

JC