

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, APRIL 12, 2008

SIX-TRY GLOUCESTER BACK ON TRACK

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 39 SARACENS 16

If there was one thing Gloucester managed to keep following their Heineken Cup defeat at the hands of Munster last weekend it was their sense of perspective.

Head coach Dean Ryan is not an individual who gets too emotionally entangled with either a defeat or a victory and he was clear eyed enough following Gloucester's six-try success over Saracens to acknowledge there are still areas to improve on.

But anyone who thought his side might be a soft touch or be on a permanent slide in the Guinness Premiership failed to see the Munster set-back for what it was or that Gloucester were capable of producing this type of victory over Saracens.

"I said last week I am convinced about the direction this team is going in," Ryan said. "Where we are in our progress means we run the risk of being bumped around sometimes but we understood last week for what it was and have tried to progress it.

"We didn't beat ourselves up after we lost that game because we did some really good things. It was about taking positives out of it and we did that.

"We know we have a movement game but under-pinning that are the details that make us function and today we saw them – I am really pleased with the result and where it puts us with the games coming up."

Considering the enormity of the previous seven days, both teams played some excellent rugby and despite the score line, Saracens were at times more than a handful in their ability to move the ball.

But for the most part Gloucester stopped them pretty much dead in their tracks. They knocked seven shades of whatever colour you choose out of them at the contact area, got powerful runners like Akapusi Qera getting over the gain line and had a contribution from stand-off Ryan Lamb that hinted at all the good things in his game.

Chuck in a cracking performance from Marco Bortolami – one of his best of the season – and a solid example of how to operate the set-piece – and Gloucester had just about everything in place to launch themselves clear at the top of the league.

However, it was Saracens first to show. Their movement in midfield was at times a joy and they set themselves with a great opportunity following Dan Scarbrough's burst up the centre following Kevin Sorrell's dummy run but instead of sending Richard Haughton in for what would have been a certain try, his pass to Kameli Ratuvou was forward.

Gloucester then served notice of their intent with the first try. Qera reacted first when scrappy possession came his way from a scrum, Mike Tindall combined with Bortolami in midfield and when Lamb moved play to the left Willie Walker delivered his pass perfectly for James Simpson-Daniel to score.

A 7-0 lead became 12 moments later. Again Lamb played a key part, throwing a long ball towards Walker in the line. Gloucester recycled, Lesley Vainikolo came in to add his weight to the attack and Iain Balshaw sent Qera in down the short side for the try.

Both Lamb and Glen Jackson swapped penalties before the break to leave Gloucester 15-3 ahead but the home side effectively won the contest in the space of 15 minutes after the interval.

For that they could thank the impish Lamb who scored two tries of contrasting excellence to set Gloucester on their way. First, he scooped up Neil de Kock's poor clearance, burst through the first line of Saracens cover, stepped away from Hugh Vyvyan and danced past Haughton for a lovely individual score he also converted.

Worse was to follow for Saracens four minutes later. Ben Skirving won a line-out at the tail and de Kock fired out towards Jackson but as the stand-off went to deliver his pass, Lamb read it perfectly, took the interception and had enough gas to reach the line from all of 75 metres despite the desperate attempts of Haughton.

The score took Gloucester 29-3 ahead and effectively killed the contest. They then delivered the sort of endorsement that so convinces Ryan he is on the right path.

Gloucester defended well against a series of close range drives before turning over the ball. Scrum-half Rory Lawson, excellent throughout, kicked towards Balshaw who got up well. There appeared little danger but Gareth Delve steamed onto the ball, Qera thundered into Haughton and Gloucester went steaming left.

Lamb sent out a long pass towards Simpson-Daniel, Walker added support and Vainikolo finished the move by plonking Scarbrough on his bottom and bursting away to the line.

They should have scored again minutes later when Lamb kicked diagonally for Balshaw but instead of taking the catch in the corner, he opted to off-load inside and Bortolami couldn't take the pass.

However, they did managed a sixth try when Lawson capped a fine display by breaking blind off a scrum to reach the right corner to take Gloucester 39-3 ahead. With the job done, Gloucester eased off in the closing stages and Saracens scored twice late on. First, the mightily impressive Adam Powell finished off a cut and thrust move started by David Seymour from a line-out and with the final play of the match Skirving scored from Gordon Ross's cross-field kick.

Powell looks a very good player and he was elusive enough throughout to cause Gloucester some midfield problems but for the home side it was a performance and a result that will take them forward in the coming weeks.

Gloucester Team

15. Willie Walker 14. Iain Balshaw 13. James Simpson-Daniel 12. Mike Tindall 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 Narraway

16. Olivier Azam 17. Jack Forster 18. Will James 19. Gareth Delve 20. Gareth Cooper 21. Chris Paterson 22. Jack Adams

Saracens Team

15. Richard Haughton 14. Dan Scarbrough 13. Kevin Sorrell 12. Adam Powell 11. Kameli Ratuvou 10. Glen Jackson 9. Neil De Kock 1. Matias Agüero 2. Matt Cairns 3. Cobus Visagie 4. Hugh Vyvyan 5. Tom Ryder 6. Kris Chesney 7. Donald Barrell 8. Ben Skirving

16. Fabio Ongaro 17. Cencus Johnston 18. Iain Fullarton 19. David Seymour 20. Moses Rauluni 21. Gordon Ross 22. Rodd Penney

HT: 15 - 3

Attendance: 12,300

JC