

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, APRIL 19, 2008**

## **QERA'S HAT-TRICK SINKS LEEDS**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 39 LEEDS CARNEGIE 16**

For the second week in succession Gloucester collected a cherished bonus point victory that enhances their cause for a home play-off in the Guinness Premiership.

But this five-try success – lit up with a hat-trick from the outstanding Akapusi Qera – was not as one-sided as the scoreboard would suggest.

If Leeds Carnegie had that little bit of quality to go with their wonderful heart and application, work-rate and dedication they are unlikely to be bottom of the Premiership. Gloucester dominated both territory and possession for so long the whole process became almost monotonous but Leeds made Gloucester strive exceptionally hard for the break through.

Their application and belief defied their position as relegation certainties and they have enough young talent in the likes of centre Luther Burrell and full-back Leigh Hinton to suggest at a bright future should they be able to knit it together.

Here, despite their abilities to disrupt and man-handle at the contact area, they had no answer to the power of Qera, the strong-arm thudding of Mike Tindall and the relentless surging of Will James and Alasdair Strokosch.

For Qera, the contest was a personal triumph and exploded the myth he is only suited to dry weather pitches. Gloucester have known about his abilities for a while and his hat-trick was not some sort of glory hunt on the end of all the good work. He stays upright, carries ball in dangerous areas and is a brilliant reader of the game when Ryan Lamb has the ball.

His first try came after 13 frustrating minutes for the home side. Gareth Delve picked up from a scrum and linked with Gareth Cooper on an outside break that got in behind Leeds' defence. When play fragmented into two rucks, Qera lined himself up outside Lamb, carried ferociously hard and reached the line from distance.

In all fairness to Leeds, Gloucester were asked to work exceptionally hard in the opening stages and when they were penalised off the side at a ruck Alberto Di Bernardo kicked the penalty for 7-3.

That became 7-6 when the same player struck a second penalty after 23 minutes when Leeds drove a line-out infield following a probing kick forward.

It was that tight that Lamb kicked a penalty for Gloucester to squeeze out a narrow lead and for all his probing, some excellent catching and distribution from Willie Walker and hard carrying from Tindall, Gloucester had to wait until the 28th minute for their second try.

Strokosch held a line-out at the tail and when Tindall received possession in midfield, he turned and swivelled and Qera collected his off-load to burst through a gap and up the centre. Gloucester's forwards arrived in numbers, drove Leeds back to the line and hooker Olivier Azam popped up with the try to establish a 17-9 lead.

Leeds were feisty enough to lose skipper Stuart Hooper to the sinbin alongside James for a spot of naughties that ended in a pile of bodies seven minutes from half-time and it took Gloucester until 10 minutes after the re-start to score again when Lamb kicked a penalty for off-side.

The lead was big enough to allow Gloucester some comfort and when Di Bernardo hesitated fatally with his pass, Lamb took his ball and for the second game running raced unchallenged to the line for try number three.

The score acted like a sucker punch to Leeds. For all the industry of Hooper, Calum Clarke and Pablo Bouza, the visitors started to run out of steam.

Gloucester went for them around the fringes – they started winning more serious line-out ball and got Lesley Vainikolo crunching forward more frequently.

Gloucester were to score twice more in the last quarter and Qera would get both of them. The first came after 62 minutes when Gloucester dragged in a line-out, Marco Bortolami peeled away on the drive and from distance Qera used his leg power to punch another hole close to the posts to score. Lamb converted to take Gloucester 32-9 ahead and then six minutes later the Fijian international completed his hat-trick.

At this stage the margin of victory looked conclusive but it took any amount of exceptional work from Tindall in the middle and Gareth Delve to name only two who kept Gloucester's collective heads above water.

And when Bortolami was again involved following a line-out that dragged play close to the line, Qera burrowed into the ruck, picked up the ball and reached over to score his first hat-trick in Gloucester colours.

To give Leeds all the credit they deserve, they bounced off the ropes and grabbed a try of their own two minutes from time. After Bortolami was sinbinned for taking out a man in a line-out, replacement Darren Edwards slithered home from short range to give Leeds a well deserved score. But this was Gloucester's day and they seem to be gathering themselves at just the right time.

#### Gloucester Team

15. Willie Walker 14. Iain Balshaw 13. James Simpson-Daniel 12. Mike Tindall 11. Lesley Vainikolo 10. Ryan Lamb 9. Gareth Cooper 1. Alasdair Dickinson 2. Olivier Azam 3. Carlos Nieto 4. Will James 5. Marco Bortolami 6. Alasdair Strokosch 7. Akapusi Qera 8. Gareth Delve

16. Andy Titterrell 17. Jack Forster 18. Alex Brown 19. Peter Buxton 20. Rory Lawson 21. Chris Paterson 22. Olly Morgan

Leeds Carnegie Team

15. Leigh Hinton 14. Scott Armstrong 13. Rob Vickerman 12. Luther Burrell 11. John Holtby 10. Alberto Di Bernardo 9. Joe Bedford 1. Mike MacDonald 2. James Parkes 3. Fosi Pala'amo 4. Pablo Bouza 5. Stuart Hooper 6. Rhys Oakley 7. Calum Clark 8. Mark Lock

16. Adam Hopcroft 17. Viliami Ma'asi 18. Erik Lund 19. Kearnan Myall 20. Darren Edwards 21. James Brooks 22. Jon Goodridge

HT: 17 - 9

Attendance: 11,753

JC