

GLoucester Rugby

SUNDAY, MAY 4, 2008

GLORIOUS GLOUCESTER STUN WASPS

LONDON WASPS 17 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 25

If ever there was a vindication of what Gloucester are trying to achieve, a justification of the vision in place at Kingsholm, then serious concrete steps were taken in Wycombe against European champions Wasps.

It would be ridiculous to suggest Gloucester have finally found the cure to all their potential problems off the back of one victory but as a stepping stone this was a Rubicon crossed and is the strongest suggestion possible this squad can achieve plenty when the sheer focus levels, energy and enthusiasm are as well directed as this.

The last team to beat Wasps in the Guinness Premiership was Gloucester and they did so again against a side with eight successive victories behind them to emphasise the upward curve in their development.

If ever there was a team performance from back to front, this was it. When Olly Morgan was not hurtling with startling bravery towards an up an under, then Nick Wood was doing the sort of work at scrum-time that reduced Wasps to their component parts by the end. In the middle it is also no wonder why Mike Tindall gets injured when he delivers a display of such blockbusting physicality and bravery.

There was no question Gloucester believed they could stretch Wasps with their attacking game could they secure enough ball – their performance in the EDF Energy Cup suggested they could be a threat.

What they desperately needed to match was Wasps' remarkable physicality levels which is why head coach Dean Ryan opted for five forwards on the bench. They were always going to be a handful at the scrummage – Carlos Nieto and Co. saw to that – but the telling factor was that they won the majority of the collisions.

It is expected that Akapusi Qera and Alasdair Stokosch will get grim and grotty at the business end of proceedings but when the likes of Anthony Allen and Ryan Lamb are emptying opponents then it is pretty obvious Gloucester's all-round game was in full working order.

Lamb was tremendous – his kicking game against the rush defence was brilliantly executed – the chase was no less impressive and the follow-up emphatic. It is doubtful that Wasps have made so many basic errors in a month of Sundays and for that Gloucester deserve credit because they were relentless.

To be effective they needed a good start and they got one immediately. Qera carried hard on an angled break and when Lamb received the ball, he kicked brilliantly towards Josh Lewsey. If the kick was just about perfect then Morgan's chase was just as good. His smother forced a turnover and James Simpson-Daniel scooped up the loose ball and went behind the sticks.

Lamb missed the conversion but it hardly seemed to matter. Gloucester were off and running and after 10 minutes scored again. They shifted the point of attack well against the blitz defence and when Allen sensed an opportunity to the short side, Rory Lawson fed Qera and Iain Balshaw broke down the wing.

Gloucester arrived in numbers – Alex Brown and Marco Bortolami hit hard up the centre – and when Tindall came short on a pass he had strength and power to beat Paul Sackey to the line.

This time, Lamb knocked over the conversion and Gloucester were 12-0 ahead. Wasps did their mighty best in every phase. Riki Flutey ran hard, Raphael Ibanez was always a handful and they shifted the ball around but Gloucester's defence was solid and true.

Danny Cipriani did land a 20th minute penalty that was soon cancelled out by Lamb but when Nieto was yellow carded for not rolling away at the ruck, Wasps scored from the line-out drive when Ibanez was driven over.

That was how the score stayed until the break but Wasps really should have scored again when Ibanez and Simon Shaw combined from a short range line-out and after a wave of pressure, Rory Lawson made a brilliant try-saving tackle on Fraser Waters, who broke towards the line.

It was the sort of commitment and desperation that summed up Gloucester's cause and eight minutes into the second half they went 22-10 ahead.

Lamb scragged Cipriani – despite Wasps' claims of a high tackle – Strokosch turned the ball over and although Lamb's kick slid off the outside of his boot, Simpson-Daniel took a brilliant catch, fended off Sackey brilliantly close to the touchline and with a brilliant piece of skill sent Morgan to the line for the score.

Gloucester had been here before: ahead against Wasps and going into the last quarter but had been unable to close the match out. Here, they were able to do it – despite a second try for Ibanez when he ran through following a scrambled line-out with 18 minutes to go.

Gloucester's organisation never wavered, their belief never cracked.

With Tindall hurling himself under moving traffic and Balshaw kicking intelligently into space, Gloucester maintained their composure and Wasps even introduced Jeremy Staunton in place of Cipriani to change their fortunes around.

But when Gloucester switched on the power at the scrum and kept the ball in the closing stages, they won a penalty when Wasps were penalised for not rolling away at the tackle and Lamb added the points to take the visitors eight points clear.

Lamb's clenched fist reaction towards the bench summed up the mood – Gloucester were not going to be moved – despite Wasps' best efforts and didn't the travelling supporters just know it.

Wasps Team

15. Josh Lewsey 14. Paul Sackey 13. Fraser Waters 12. Riki Flutey
11. Tom Voyce 10. Danny Cipriani 9. Eoin Reddan 1. Tom French
2. Raphael Ibanez 3. Tim Payne 4. Simon Shaw 5. Tom Palmer 6. Joe
Worsley 7. Tom Rees 8. Lawrence Dallaglio

16. Joe Ward 17. Michael Holford 18. George Skivington 19. James
Haskell 20. Mark McMillan 21. Mark Van Gisbergen 22. Jeremy
Staunton

Gloucester Rugby Team

15. Olly Morgan 14. Iain Balshaw 13. Mike Tindall 12. Anthony Allen
11. James Simpson-Daniel 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 Narryway

16. Olivier Azam 17. Alasdair Dickinson 18. Will James 19. Peter
Buxton 20. Gareth Delves 21. Gareth Cooper 22. Willie Walker

HT: 10 - 15

Attendance: 10,000

JC