

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2008**

**KINGSHOLM – GUINNESS PREMIERSHIP**

**FIVE-STAR GLOUCESTER UP TO SECOND**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 39 BRISTOL RUGBY 10**

**Match Report by Alastair Downey**

For the thick end of 60-odd minutes in this contest, Gloucester produced the sort of performance that characterised their assault on the Guinness Premiership last season.

Invigorated by another cracking performance from scrum-half Dave Lewis and some slick, instinctive handling skills from Ryan Lamb, Gloucester scored five tries to move up to second in the table.

They look a side rediscovering some confidence and enjoyment and the likes of Lewis and Lamb could strut their stuff because ahead of them the heavyweights like Alex Brown, Peter Buxton and Apo Satala demonstrated an ability to get the grim and grotty work done with clinical precision.

Buxton was rewarded with two scores and Brown one as Gloucester made Bristol pay for a catalogue of missed tackles in the first half.

Gloucester made a habit of picking off stragglers in the wide areas as early as the 10 minutes mark and got head of the game early thanks to their structure and organisation. The scores were locked at 3-3 after nine minutes when the home side scored their first try.

The initial break came from Lewis, who hurtled through a gap from a line-out and burst over half-way. Iain Balshaw came in to support and when Gloucester recycled to the left, Lamb sent Olly Morgan haring into space and he got past Ed Barnes and Graeme Beveridge to score brilliantly.

This was Gloucester at their best. They were quick, incisive and kept the ball moving. There are not many sides who can match their movement game and there were glimpses it is returning.

Bristol struggled to get into the contest and conceded a second try after 15 minutes. Again Lewis was involved when he snuck down the short side from Buxton's little pass to make huge ground before Luke Arscott made the tackle. However, Buxton followed up and ploughed through the tackles to score.

Lamb's conversion made it 17-3 and then the stand-off landed a drop-goal after another bout of home pressure.

Although the scrums were hugely contested, neither team established a serious dividend from them but with Brown manipulating Gloucester's line-out routine to great effect, the home side had more than enough possession to do damage.

The game was almost exclusively played in Bristol's last third of the field and eight minutes before the break, Gloucester scored again. Morgan's dart and then a lovely diagonal break from Matthew Watkins spread the Bristol defence and when they played through the hands, Lamb, Anthony Allen, Mike Tindall and Luke Narryway all combined before Buxton rounded off a lovely team try in the corner.

Lamb missed the conversion but Gloucester were 25-3 ahead at the break. The interval actually took all the steam from their sails and it took them until the end of the third quarter to score again after Bristol had at least enjoyed some sustained possession albeit in less than threatening areas of the field.

Satala weighed in with some heavy support and Lesley Vainikolo, a half-time replacement for Morgan, picked up brilliantly off his toes as Gloucester swept play to beneath the Bristol sticks. Lamb came in again and fed Narryway and although the number eight was half held, he off-loaded to Brown on a run from deep that got him over the line.

Lamb kicked the conversion to make it 32-3 and then six minutes later the stand-off made a clean sweep when he picked off Barnes' pass on half-way, kicked back his heels and burst away to score.

He converted his own score and there was the very real prospect Gloucester could go on and win this game by a significant margin but they failed to find the structure that was so impressive in the first-half.

They started to force the ball rather than manipulate it out of the tackle as they had done in the first half but the damage was done. Bristol did get plenty more ball in the closing stages and eventually got the likes of Dan Ward-Smith into space. The catalyst had been scrum-half Shaun Perry and it was his half-break and offload that created Bristol's only score.

Although he was snared by tacklers, he somehow got the ball away to David Lemi and the winger stepped brilliantly away from the cover and rounded Iain Balshaw for a brilliant solo score.

But the score was little more than a consolation because, despite all their cussedness in the tight phases and thoroughly commendable in their enthusiasm, Gloucester were thoroughly convincing winners on a night when things took another significant leap forward.

JC