

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2008**

KINGSHOLM – GUINNESS PREMIERSHIP

LAMB AND BARKLEY FIRE GLOUCESTER

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 33 NORTHAMPTON SAINTS 10

Match Report by Alastair Downey

Gloucester produced their second successive bonus point victory to increase their momentum in the Guinness Premiership.

Managed superbly by Ryan Lamb in an all-round performance that must be one of his most significant in Gloucester colours, Kingsholm was treated to another fully absorbing contest between two teams who came to play.

Lamb's full box of tricks has been over-flowing for some time – indeed he has been throwing long, flat passes for what seems like decades – but here it was composure, management and all-round nous that caught the eye and laid the foundations for a Gloucester victory that never really looked in doubt.

He was aided by some flashes of real quality from Olly Barkley, a dynamic off-loading performance from Luke Narryway and a safe as houses effort from Iain Balshaw, who slipped into the full-back position from the wing extremely well.

When they played with width and invention, Gloucester looked a dangerous side and have re-found that ruthless streak that can cut teams to pieces. They have shed that cluttered feel to their midfield and Barkley pulled the strings with a knowing authority.

There was some good stuff too from Northampton. They came to play and had they not made quite so many errors at close quarters or been slightly more accurate when in the strike zone, could have caused Gloucester some greater problems.

Both Stephen Myler and Paul Diggin had influential afternoons, their scrum was never anything but totally full on and their line-out caused Gloucester problems in the third quarter.

Throw in an energetic effort from Ben Foden and it is easy to appreciate how they drew with Bath last weekend because they at least have a go with ball in hand.

What they didn't have was Gloucester's slickness. Barkley was involved as a second minute replacement for Anthony Allen immediately when the home side scored a peach of a try after 11 minutes.

Lamb took possession from a line-out on half-way and Barkley came flat but with enough space to see what was ahead of him and he delayed perfectly before sending Mike Tindall thudding through up the centre. The skipper arched a long pass out towards Lesley Vainikolo and the winger was aware enough to deliver the killer inside ball for Iain Balshaw to score the 49th Premiership try of his career.

Nine minutes later Gloucester scored again. Barkley and Balshaw carried well to the right following a powerful surge from Alasdair Stokosch. Luke Narryway started the move with a great off-load towards Buxton and the number eight finished it off close to the whitewash when Gloucester moved play back to the left.

That made it 15-0 and although Myler landed a penalty and Foden and Bruce Reihana were called back for a forward pass, Gloucester were dominant in the first-half. And a minute before half-time, Gloucester scored a third try – and it was another cracker.

Dave Lewis and Lamb combined from a scrum, Mike Tindall and Balshaw were set free from Barkley's pass as Gloucester's movement game swept into top gear and when they shifted possession against the face of the Saints defence, Barkley wriggled out of a tackle to score and make it 20-3.

To give credit to Northampton, they came again after the re-start. Roger Wilson, their outstanding number eight, lifted his team after the break with a couple of carrying surges, Scott Gray got about at the contact area and they at last managed to keep the ball better.

Myler and Chris Ashton were heavily involved in an array of attacks and when Diggin and Reihana breathed life into a move, Gray was on hand to round off a concerted period of Saints pressure.

They almost scored again immediately when Ashton kicked and chased his own effort and Tindall had to get back to concede a five metre scrum. Northampton were good in this period, rugged and determined – they look a side well capable of beating some good teams this season but coughed up too much ball at vital times.

However, their period of pressure didn't last long. When Myler chased after his own little chip, Rory Lawson gathered and set Gloucester off to the left. Strokosch came in to lend a hand and when Barkley gathered possession close to the touchline, he threaded a lovely little roller in behind the Saints defence and Vainikolo dived in to score another very good team try.

That made it 27-10 and buried the contest even further. There was still time for Gloucester to threaten again when Narraway, Balshaw, Tindall, Strokosch and Vainikolo all carried hard against a well organised Saints defence but could not find the killer pass.

But it was left to Lamb to add the gloss – two additional penalties took Gloucester over the hill and beyond and gave an indication of what the future may hold as Dean Ryan's side made it eight victories in nine matches.