

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2008**

**CENTRO SAN MICHELE – HEINEKEN CUP**

**SIX TRIES EASE GLOUCESTER HOME**

**RUGBY CALVISANO 17 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 40**

**Match Report by Alastair Downey**

It wasn't all it might have been but Gloucester completed everything they had to in Calvisano to keep their Heineken Cup qualification hopes very much alive.

Despite scoring six tries, Gloucester's return almost feels slightly under-par considering the rich seam of form they entered the contest with – they were efficient rather than dashing and fully cut-throat in their performance.

It says all you need to know that their two most effective players were number eight Luke Narryway and lock Will James, who did their utmost against the Calvisano effort.

Narryway scored one try and made another in an energetic performance and James was a destructive defender and willing ball carrier in another very effective display from the second row.

There were also some pleasing touches from Ryan Lamb and replacement Dave Lewis but Gloucester simply didn't go through the phases for long enough to stretch a side who know all the tricks in the book on a narrow, heavy ground.

Gloucester lacked structure and cohesion at times and never really clicked through the enviable set of gears they possess. When they did, Calvisano simply ran out of legs and defenders in the wide areas but Gloucester's effectiveness came in fits and starts rather than for any great period.

But the victory means Gloucester maintain their interest in the competition and a similar five-point haul next weekend will set-up two mouth-watering contests against Cardiff and Biarritz.

Gloucester managed three tries in each half but Calvisano deserve a huge amount of credit for their line-out operation, comfortably the best aspect of their performance and a second half defensive display that was never anything but wholly committed.

After a thoroughly nervous opening characterised by a rally of poor kicking from both teams, Gloucester slowly built on their foundation laid in the set scrum and a comfortable defensive performance that allowed them to dominate the second quarter.

But the contest was characterised by slipshod errors and it was only in the build up to Gloucester's third try of the half that they managed to keep the ball through a number of phases that stretched Calvisano's over-worked defence.

It took Gloucester six minutes to shake off their sluggishness and it came a little by default. Calvisano controlled a line-out on half-way but when they looked to shift possession it was so slow and sluggish that Lamb simply waited to pick Paolo Buso's pocket to take his pass and run beneath the sticks.

Olly Barkley landed the conversion but Calvisano hit back with a 13th minute Buso penalty when Olly Morgan was turned over looking to off-load a pass that wasn't there. It was all mighty frustrating – Gloucester tried hard and had far too much for the hosts in the scrum, but they wandered into the second quarter with only one score.

They turned up the temperature when Narraway unloaded a lovely little kick down the right for Mark Foster to chase and they set up camp deep in Calvisano territory for the next eight or nine minutes. Through Carlos Nieto and Alasdair Dickinson, Gloucester drove a series of scrums right through the heart of the home set-piece and from the umpteenth re-set, Narraway picked up and scored.

Barkley's conversion made it 14-3 and then three minutes before the break got their third try. Lamb stretched the defence with a couple of raking passes towards Lesley Vainikolo, James clattered through the midfield to the left and when Lamb shifted to the right, Matthew Watkins found Narraway with a lovely inside pass and the number eight sent Marco Bortolami in for his first Heineken Cup try.

It would be wrong to describe Gloucester's 19-3 advantage as breathing space but it certainly allowed them some leeway. What they are very good at is making the most of things in purple patches and they sealed the bonus point two minutes after the re-start.

Alasdair Stokosch made ground up the 10-12 channel and Gloucester got over the ball. Narraway and Nieto took the ball on and from Lamb's pass, Foster scored on the right. Barkley made it 26-3 and it was all very comfortable.

But the hosts then scored themselves from a scrum and it came far too easily. Buso broke comfortably and sent Ludovico Nitoglia in for the score.

On such a tight, narrow playing surface, Gloucester were required to sit in areas of the game for longer than they might have done, particularly the scrummage and when one such set-piece swung round, Nicola Cattina was red carded for aiming a punch at Stokosch.

However, it didn't seem to bother Calvisano at all. They actually cut the deficit to only nine points when they scored a second try.

They kept the pressure on with a series of well-directed line-out drives – there was nothing wrong with their application of effort – and when they peeled infield, replacement prop Alistair McKenzie smashed over to make it 26-17.

There were still 13 minutes remaining and it was now too close for comfort.

It was left to James to charge onto a coughed-up re-start to launch a new Gloucester assault and when Lamb shifted play to the right, Narraway made another telling break and off-loaded inside towards Foster, who was tackled without the ball and the referee awarded a penalty try.

And with nine minutes to go, Gloucester completed the scoring when Tindall picked up Gerard Fraser's dropped pass, stepped away from Paul Griffin and went beneath the sticks from long distance. Barkley converted and Gloucester were home and dry.

JC