

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2008**

**KINGSHOLM – HEINEKEN CUP**

**VAINIKOLO, WATKINS SECURE EURO TRIUMPH**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 48 RUGBY CALVISANO 5**

**Match Report by Alastair Downey**

Gloucester will make the trip to Guinness Premiership leaders London Irish in good health and spirit following another convincing and vital Heineken Cup victory over Calvisano.

For the second week running, Gloucester scored six tries to grow out a comfortable victory that means their re-match with Cardiff next year now takes on monstrous proportions that makes this competition so special.

Unlike Gloucester's win in Italy, both teams played significantly better here. Calvisano's blitz defence in the first half bordered on the excellent, their willingness to flog themselves to a standstill was hugely commendable and they attempted to tackle themselves to a standstill.

What they haven't got, in the same mould as the Italian national side, is the ability to run a game from 10 and 12 to compliment all their hard work further forward. They were battling and effective but a threat they were not.

It was certainly not all one way traffic but Gloucester realised that if they sat in their formation and structure for long enough, the spaces and gaps would come.

There were some wonderful contributions along the way – most notable from full-back Olly Morgan.

He has been ultra-reliable under the high ball and in the sweeping up department from the word go but here he added an extra attacking dimension – regularly slicing up the cover on the counter-attack, fielding his own high kicks to invigorate Gloucester's attacking game and generally having a right old time with it.

Throw in some lovely distributional and organisational qualities from Ryan Lamb, another inventive, purposeful and dynamic effort from Luke Narryway and a couple of incredible pieces of skill from Apo Satala and it is easy to appreciate where their threat came from.

There were also two tries each from Matthew Watkins, his first in Gloucester colours, and two more for Lesley Vainikolo as Gloucester tightened the noose late in the day.

They were 6-0 ahead thanks to two Lamb penalties early on when Calvisano plundered a try. Gloucester controlled a scrum but Lamb's clearance was charged down into the mud and his opposite number Gerard Fraser ran onto the loose ball and dived in to score.

Eight minutes later Gloucester got themselves ahead again with a lovely score. Mike Tindall acted as the pivot from a set-piece scrum, Gareth Cooper arrived again and Morgan burst through the line on a lovely angled break and he gave the scoring pass to Mark Foster.

If that was supposed to be the signal for the flood-gates to open, then Gloucester would be mistaken. Calvisano, although they kicked plenty of ball to give the home side a plentiful supply of opportunities, the Italian side defended superbly against the tide.

It meant Gloucester had to wait until the last play of the first-half before they scored again. Satala, Tindall and Lamb all pressurised the Calvisano defence with wave after wave of attacks and, finally, when they came again across the front of the posts, Narryway took Lamb's ball to bounce over and make it 20-5.

They could have scored a real beauty immediately after the re-start when Satala, Narraway, Andy Titterell, Alasdair Dickinson and Peter Buxton all sustained a move in broken field and when Buxton found Morgan in the clear, the full-back made his one real mistake when he failed to find Vainikolo with the scoring pass.

The tide was turning, however. Satala looked to have somehow plundered a third try when he loped through a series of tackles but fell against the post and lost the ball forward.

It could have got a bit nervy for Gloucester now but it was Narraway who gave them the go ahead again. He made a break full of awareness and power, Satala took over and then Cooper delivered a brilliant reverse pass towards Vainikolo, who burst through the last gap and to the sticks.

Watkins then got on the scoresheet when he picked up a ricochet in midfield to burst clear and score, and Lamb's conversion made it 34-5. Calvisano were beginning to run out of puff now – Gloucester's first-half efforts were beginning to pay off – and with Greg Somerville adding the not inconsiderable weight of 67 All Blacks caps to the set-piece, Gloucester were well on top.

However, their fifth try came from Calvisano's one piece of pressure in the half. Number eight Alessandro Zanni carried off a scrum to the short side but when he attempted to off-load, Vainikolo nipped in, collected the ball and burst clear on a lung-busting break for his second try. Lamb continued his immaculate kicking with the conversion to make it 41-5 and then with three minutes remaining, they scored their sixth try.

Rory Lawson found Lamb from a turnover at a line-out, Tindall thundered up the centre and he was able to delay his pass to perfection to send Watkins away and clear to the sticks to complete the scoring and the job for Gloucester.