

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2008

MEMORIAL STADIUM – GUINNESS PREMIERSHIP

TINDALL'S DOUBLE SINKS BRISTOL

BRISTOL RUGBY 10 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 29

Match Report by Alastair Downey

Gloucester went some way to showing the harsh lessons dished out by London Irish last week were already seeping in by responding with a bonus point victory over Bristol.

By flooding their game with the sort of energy that was missing last Saturday, they substituted some of their structure and composure but they were thoroughly worth a bonus point victory that was achieved with the final play of the contest when Mike Tindall spun out of a close-range attempt to napalm him into the middle of next week to score from close range.

Gloucester were by no means everything they might have been but they dominated the scrum, despite a catalogue of re-sets, slews, collapses and general mess and made more of a dent in defence, where Tindall led the charge with his organisation and power.

The contest was precariously positioned for the majority of the second and third quarters but Gloucester didn't panic and realised if they stayed in the contest until the end they could always be a threat from long distance.

For their part, Bristol were just Bristol. They made it their business to be a damned nuisance at the set-piece and had the brilliant David Lemi always as a threat but their limitations, despite their boundless commitment and remarkable enthusiasm, were fairly obvious.

However, if they are able to replicate the good areas they will be a match for plenty of sides pitching up at the Memorial Stadium. Points are not picked up here, Gloucester had to work for every single one of them.

But they were up and running after only four minutes. Luke Narryway drove hard at a free-kick from a scrum and it appeared Gloucester had attacked the wrong side from the breakdown but Rory Lawson's pass was fielded by Olly Morgan and he weaved out of the first tackle and burst clear into the 22. He looked to off-load but just kept going and going and as the cover converged dived between the sticks for a memorable score.

Gloucester cut out a couple of great further opportunities but couldn't finish them off. First, Olly Barkley made a slashing break as Bristol's defence rushed him in midfield but couldn't find the killer pass and then Morgan was on hand again down the right but Lemi got in to take his pass and prevent a second try.

It was at this stage that Bristol started to do the things they do best. They got Dan Ward-Smith and Alfie To'oala bursting up the middle and it needed Tindall, Alex Brown and the rest to bend some runners up the centre.

Neither side retained possession for any great length of time and neither kicked for position as well as they could but Ed Barnes kicked a penalty when Gloucester were penalised for handling on the deck and Barnes could have made it 7-6 when Brown was pinged for not releasing, but he missed the target.

Lamb then made it 10-3 at the break with his first penalty but the lead was neither conclusive nor substantial enough to prevent doubts creeping in should Mark Regan and Co. set about them at the start of the second half.

The home side could have made more of a 52nd minute break when Barnes held his pass before reversing inside to get behind Gloucester's first up defence but Tindall and Morgan both made excellent tackles to stem the tide.

It was riveting, thoroughly absorbing stuff. It was niggly and tetchy and an hour into the contest minds were beginning to wonder and tanks run out of fuel just to add to the general mayhem as bodies tired.

This was a considerable afternoon for the likes of Nick Wood, who had a tremendous contest against Jason Hobson, for Olivier Azam, who went nose to nose with most things in blue and Carlos Nieto, the set-piece specialist.

They also had Brown in rude good health and when he ran through to charge down Barnes's clearance, the second row couldn't quite gather the ball that would have opened up the contest. However, with 12 minutes remaining, Gloucester did get their second score.

By this stage, Dave Lewis was on for Lawson and the youngster was full of drive and energy. He provided a breaking option close to the contact area with him fizzing around. Lamb, Lesley Vainikolo, Tindall and Morgan were all involved but they didn't panic when the move lost impetus and Lewis picked out Tindall on a deep line and he battered his way to the posts.

That made it 17-3 and two minutes from time Gloucester scored again. Apo Satala and Morgan claimed Lamb's high kick, Alasdair Strokosch made good ground and with Bristol running out of cover, Adam Eustace appeared on the left and he sent Vainikolo in for the third try.

There was still time for Bristol to grab a try when Lemi was on hand to pick off Lamb's long ball but there was no stopping the visitors. It said much for their intent that Gloucester fancied a bonus point and when Lewis dummied and went he sent Barkley on the surge and as the support arrived, Lamb was able to use the ball well and although Tindall had to gather, he spun out of the tackle and used his strength to plunge over for his second try and Gloucester's fourth.