

# GLOUCESTER RUGBY

**SATURDAY, APRIL 18, 2009**

TWICKENHAM – EDF ENERGY CUP

TWICKENHAM HOPES LEFT IN TATTERS

CARDIFF BLUES 50 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 12

Match Report by Duncan Wood

Gloucester's EDF Energy Cup dreams were ruthlessly picked apart by a Cardiff Blues side that were superior in every aspect of the game on their way to a 50-12 win.

The final scoreline was cruel but not unmerited as the Blues took the game to Gloucester from the off, storming into a comfortable lead before withstanding an attempted comeback and applying the coup de grace late on.

It was a victory based upon superb performances from the likes of Ma'ama Molitika and Martyn Williams with Nicky Robinson in the role of orchestra at fly half[*sic*] and clinical finishing from the likes of Leigh Halfpenny and Ben Blair.

Gloucester competed gamely but were unable to match the physicality of their Welsh opponents who swatted aside any Cherry and White ripostes before making the most of any opportunity that came their way.

The result leaves Gloucester physically battered and bruised and also having to bounce back mentally ahead of a huge Guinness Premiership encounter on Tuesday night at home to Worcester Warriors.

It was ominous from the off. Gloucester looked to have turned over useful ball on halfway but the ball ran loose and Tauf'au Filise rumbled clear and was well supported by Jason Spice.

Quick recycled ball led to Cardiff driving to within metres of the Gloucester [line] but holding on in the tackle stopped the charge. It was Spice's last contribution as he left the field injured but it did little to de-rail the Cardiff juggernaut.

Gloucester were unable to clear their lines and Cardiff won vital lineout ball on Gloucester's throw leading to a penalty for a Gloucester forward not rolling away but Ben Blair, usually so reliable, missed a kickable shot at goal.

And Cardiff were almost made to regret the miss as Olly Morgan confidently took a high ball setting up good ball for the backs. Watkins and Narraway linked well before Allen put in a testing kick. Cardiff held on but Lamb's penalty shaved the right-hand post to keep the game scoreless.

However, Cardiff moved straight downfield with the pack firstly softening up the Gloucester defence before Kingsholm bound Nicky Robinson made an incisive break. Shanklin and Halfpenny were in support and Rush's pass out of the back put Halfpenny in for the score. Blair converted for 7-0 after 11 minutes.

Cardiff were rampant and Gloucester reeling and Shanklin so nearly burst clear following the restart but lost the ball in contact. Cardiff were offloading well out of the tackle and it was only great defensive work keeping them at bay.

But the incessant pressure brought its reward on 19 minutes when Ryan Lamb was adjudged to have come in at the side of a ruck and Blair kicked the penalty for a 10-0 lead.

And it went from bad to worse for Dean Ryan's men as Shanklin took an offload at pace, Martyn Williams was in support and his long pass put an untouched Halfpenny behind the posts. Blair's conversion made it 17-0 after 21 minutes.

The onslaught had left Gloucester rattled and a short lineout tapped back to Cardiff hooker Gareth Jenkins almost resulted in a third try but for Alex Brown's covering tackle at the corner.

Starved of possession for so long, Gloucester moved threateningly into Cardiff's 22 after Ben Blair spilled a Lamb up and under but Mark Foster held on in the tackle and Cardiff cleared their lines.

But Gloucester finally got their reward as Akapusi Qera took Lamb's short pass and barrelled into the 22. The ball came back left and Delve's pass gave Foster just enough room to show great strength and touch down. Lamb was just off target with the conversion but Gloucester were off the mark although 17-5 down.

It was important that Gloucester held out to half time but another muscular effort from the Cardiff pack put the Cherry and Whites on the back foot near their own line and Will James was just able to hold off the challenge of Ryan Lamb[*sic*] and touch down in the corner.

Blair's conversion was off target but a 22-5 half time lead left the Blues heading down the tunnel at half time with a more than useful lead and Gloucester scratching their heads as to what they could do to stem the tide and get back in the game in the second half.

No changes were made by either side at the interval and Gloucester spent the first few minutes probing for an opening but the Cardiff defence was resolute and their defensive kicking game in good order.

But Lamb gave Gloucester a ray of hope on 47 minutes as he shaped to kick from his own 22 but dummied his way clear and over halfway. His long pass found Qera who freed Foster but Qera steamed into the breakdown and was penalised.

It would have been a tall order to replicate the drama of the first half but, with Cardiff in the box seat and Gloucester having to force matters, the game descended into a sequence of long kicks and knock-ons when the ball was kept in hand.

As the game approached the hour mark, Gloucester were still unable to break clear of the sky blue shackles and the Blues came closest with the outstanding Molitika to the fore and Robinson pulling the strings from fly half and tormenting his future team mates with a series of measured kicks.

Gloucester rang the changes but were dealt a blow as Andrew Hazell took the field and then had to depart after only a few minutes with a shoulder injury.

There was no lack of effort but Cardiff simply absorbed everything that was thrown at them and their back three were winning the kicking duel.

The killer score came on 66 minutes and was shrouded with controversy. Cardiff looked to be guilty of obstruction as Gloucester chased a high kick. Referee Rolland saw nothing wrong and the Blues countered with Blair diving triumphantly under the posts. His conversion saw the Blues move well clear at 29-5.

Lady luck had well and truly deserted Gloucester and, when a clearance kick bounced badly for Matthew Watkins, Ceri Sweeney needed no second invitation to scoop up the loose ball and score under the posts.

Gloucester dug deep and the pack won a consolation prize as they forced a penalty try but late tries from Blair and Shanklin, capitalising on Gloucester errors as they chanced their arm from deep in search of further morale boosting scores, simply rubbed salt into the wounds.