

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, APRIL 25, 2009

ADAMS PARK – GUINNESS PREMIERSHIP

WASPS SWEEP ASIDE SHATTERED GLOUCESTER

LONDON WASPS 34 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 3

Match Report by Duncan Wood

The curtain came down on Gloucester's season on Saturday afternoon at an emotionally charged Adams Park with Wasps emerging deserved 34-3 winners.

The past week has seen the 2008-9 season unravel in spectacular fashion. Only last weekend, the Cherry and White hordes descended on Twickenham en masse hoping to see Gloucester lift the EDF Energy Cup.

However, defeat at the hands of Cardiff followed by two Guinness Premiership losses in five days means that Gloucester last won against Ospreys on March 28th which would have been unthinkable at the time.

Gloucester failed to make the end of season play offs for the first time since 2005-6 as they finished in sixth place overall, a desperately disappointing outcome given the team's position just a few weeks ago.

The preparations for 2009-10 will now begin in earnest with Head Coach Dean Ryan already having admitted that a rebuilding process is required.

Gloucester needed to win on the day to have any chance of forcing their way into the playoffs but it never looked likely once Wasps edged their way in front.

The Wycombe based outfit have traditionally finished the season well and they set about today's task with relish.

The Men in Black simply had too much pace, power and desire and, although Gloucester showed great commitment, they were no match on the day as Wasps wrapped up a bonus point win.

Ultimately, though, the effort needed to play three games in seven days in addition to a crippling injury list really did take its toll on a battered and bruised squad.

Gloucester were forced into changing their starting line up before kick off with centre Anthony Allen a late withdrawal. Olly Barkley came into the starting line-up and Jack Adams was recalled from Moseley to take his place amongst the replacements.

The atmosphere at Adams Park leading up to kick off was electric with the PA regularly reminding the crowd that several of their favourite sons were playing their final home game. The question was, could Gloucester spoil the party?

The game started with the almost inevitable spell of aerial ping pong before Olly Barkley stunned the home crowd by going for the posts with a penalty a good four metres inside the Gloucester half. Perhaps predictably the kick was short and wide.

Six minutes later, from around 45 metres out, Danny Cipriani produced a far sweeter strike and kicked Wasps into a 3-0 lead after Gloucester were guilty of hands in the ruck.

Wasps were visibly lifted and confident enough for Kingsholm bound Tom Voyce to run from his own 22 having marked a long kick. Lewsey and Waldouck carried the move on but Gloucester scrambled back.

However, Wasps struck on 14 minutes as Cipriani took a quick tap and kicked ahead for Lewsey to chase. Olly Morgan was caught by Lewsey and robbed in contact. Waldouck popped the ball up for Flutey to crash over in the corner. Cipriani converted for a 10-0 lead.

It had been a tough few minutes for the Cherry and Whites but Carlos Spencer drilled a magnificent penalty kick from hand into the Wasps 22. A kickable penalty was then turned down and drilled to the corner.

Wasps held out but hooker Rob Webber was sinbinned for over vigorous use of the boot. Gloucester opted to scrummage against the 7 men but, following two penalties against the home team, Gloucester went wide and were turned over, Simon Shaw galloping up to halfway before being hauled down.

There was no little endeavour from Dean Ryan's men but the grizzled old pros of the Wasps line up – Vickery, Shaw and Betsen – were all over the park and putting in hit after hit.

There was a need to put points on the board and Barkley duly obliged with a 34th minute penalty when Morgan was barged off the ball chasing a high kick but Wasps duly got the three points back when Cipriani punished Apo Satala for breaking early off a scrum.

With a few minutes to go until half time, it was a crucial spell of the game and Wasps turned the screw. Worsley made the initial inroads before Waldouck and Flutey combined to put Voyce over in the corner. Cipriani added the extras and Gloucester were looking down the barrel at 20-3.

As the team trooped off at half time and scores from elsewhere confirming that the top four in the Guinness Premiership table were all in the ascendant, it was going to take a massive second half performance to prolong Gloucester's season.

No changes for Gloucester at the break but Wasps withdrew Cipriani, who had kicked beautifully in the first half and brought on Jeremy Staunton.

And despite losing their pivot, Wasps came out the stronger with Joe Simpson and Riki Flutey testing with their elusive running and Worsley applying the muscle.

A triple change brought on Titterell, Wood and Brown and Gloucester showed their spirit as they smashed Wasps backwards when their line came under threat immediately afterwards. Despite the commitment, Wasps were pouring forward and Gloucester even suffered the indignity of their former skipper, Phil Vickery, indulging in dive passes.

Desperate defence was being called for and the penalty count started to rise as Gloucester had to resort to illegal tactics to keep the home team at bay and Charlie Sharples paid the price on 52 minutes when he was sinbinned by referee Dave Pearson for coming in at the side of a ruck. The Adams Park crowd were now in full voice and imploring Josh Lewsey to get the ball to give him a chance to sign off in style with a try.

Gloucester received a break when Serge Betsen looked to have scored the third try after a break from Joe Simpson. Referee Pearson seemed to have awarded the try but the touch judge spotted an apparent knock on. But, it was short term relief as Gloucester tried to go from their own line. Barkley couldn't hang on to a high pass and Riki Flutey dived on the loose ball for a simple score. Staunton converted for 27-3 going into the final quarter.

Olly Morgan looked to restore some pride with a weaving run into the Wasps 22 and Luke Narraway supported well but James Haskell stepped in with a timely steal to slam the door shut.

Gloucester went after a consolation score but even that was denied them. Charlie Sharples couldn't quite gather a cross kick and Olly Morgan was tackled just short.

Instead, Wasps finished on a high as Gloucester's midfield defence was carved open. Betsen sprinted into the 22 before Wasps recycled the ball quickly and Simon Shaw muscled his way over. Staunton converted to deliver the final blow at 34-3 and leave Gloucester contemplating where it all went wrong.