

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

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OSPREYS TAKE FRIENDLY SPOILS WITH LATE TRY

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 16 OSPREYS 22

Match Report by Duncan Wood

Gloucester and the Ospreys treated the Kingsholm crowd to an entertaining pre-season friendly on Saturday afternoon with the Welsh region scoring two late Dan Biggar tries to earn the win.

Gloucester looked well set to finish their preseason campaign on a high and the performance will give Head Coach Bryan Redpath plenty of positives to think about before the Guinness Premiership opener next weekend.

However, Wales U20 fly half Dan Biggar had the decisive final words as he crossed twice in the last few minutes, to clinch the game.

So, pre-season comes to an end for Gloucester with one win, one draw and one defeat from the three fixtures.

Perhaps more importantly, however, is the fact that performances have improved from the first game to the last, injuries have been few and far between and players have staked a claim for selection giving Bryan Redpath plenty of selection issues to ponder upon.

The game started in conservative fashion with both teams taking time to take a look at each other and both fly halves using the tactical kick.

The first scoring opportunity came Gloucester's way as Nicky Robinson drilled a penalty close to the Ospreys corner flag but the 5m lineout went to ground and Gloucester gave away a penalty on the floor.

Gloucester then survived a scare as Tom Voyce was caught in possession near his own line fielding a through kick from Ospreys scrum half Liam Davies.

The initial danger was thwarted but Gloucester faced a defensive 5m lineout. The forwards rumbled to within a metre or so before the ball was transferred left for wing Nikki Walker to stretch out a long arm and dot the ball down for a 5-0 lead after 9 minutes.

Gloucester were finding it tough breaking down a very physical Ospreys defence in these opening exchanges and Robinson mixed things up neatly with a chip over the top for James Simpson-Daniel to chase. The flying wing seemed to be obstructed but referee Owens incurred the wrath of the Kingsholm faithful by seeing nothing untoward.

Owens then incensed the crowd once more as he penalised Gloucester for holding on in the tackle when Ospreys flanker Marty Holah seemed to be a long way offside.

Ospreys fly half Dan Biggar then rubbed salt in the wound by slotting the penalty from several metres inside his own half to make the score 0-8.

Gloucester hit back. Rory Lawson made a sniping break and offloaded to the rampaging Dave Attwood. The big second row couldn't run over the top of full back Barry Davies as he steamed into the 22 and his pass to the supporting Alex Brown was low and nudged forward.

The Ospreys were caught offside, however, as they chased the clearance kick and Nicky Robinson got Gloucester onto the scoreboard with a well struck penalty.

There was a greater urgency from the home team now and the crowd acknowledged the effort being put in. The Ospreys were being stretched and started to concede penalties and Robinson made the score 6-8 on the half hour with a simple penalty.

It had been a far better 10 minutes for Gloucester with Attwood showing up well and new centre Fuimaono-Sapolu showing quick feet and strength in the centre.

With half time approaching, referee Owens finally lost patience with the Ospreys back row and sinbinned Filo Tiatia for coming in at the side. Gloucester kicked for the corner and tried to muscle their way over to no avail. Plan B was to use Charlie Sharples off his wing and the U20 international was brought down just short. His opposite number Nikki Walker illegally stole the ball on the deck and followed Tiatia to the sin bin.

With their numeric superiority, Gloucester understandably chose to scrummage but the set piece went round 90 degrees and the chance was gone.

However, there was one last opportunity for Gloucester as Robinson turned the ball over in midfield. Akapusi Qera took it on, well supported by Fuimaono-Sapolu before the ball was moved right for Charlie Sharples to sprint into the corner from 40 metres out. Robinson's touchline conversion drifted just wide but Gloucester went into the break with an 11-8 lead.

The Ospreys had edged the opening quarter but Gloucester had bounced back in fine style to take the lead and everything was set for a fascinating second period.

The visitors made a raft of half time replacements whilst Gloucester opted to only introduce Alasdair Dickinson to the action. Would the Ospreys cohesion be affected?

It appeared that way as Gloucester struck first. The Ospreys were turned over after gathering a Robinson up and under and Rory Lawson was quick to play the ball. Sharples and Robinson combined with the fly half offloading out of the tackle for Sharples to score his second of the afternoon. The conversion shaved the wrong side of the post but Gloucester had a 16-8 lead.

Gloucester then had to work hard in defence as the Ospreys sought to work their way back into the game but survived with their line intact before bringing on Apo Satala, Carlos Spencer and Tim Molenaar for Qera, Robinson and Tindall respectively after 55 minutes.

Spencer immediately delighted the crowd with one of his trademark 'banana' kicks into the corner to give Gloucester great field position but the pack couldn't drive it over from the 5m lineout.

Perhaps as a result of all the replacements that had been made, things were starting to open up. Spencer almost found Sharples with a cross kick whilst James Simpson-Daniel had to scramble back well in defence to cover a Tom Isaacs grubber after a smart break by the Ospreys replacement scrum half.

There were some delightful touches from Gloucester in attack but it was the Ospreys who got the vital next score as Nikki Walker burst through in midfield. Gloucester scrambled back but Ospreys had the numbers and Dan Biggar strolled over to score and convert for 16-15 after 66 minutes.

The entertaining nature of the game continued and Gloucester showed great adventure to counter from their own half with James Simpson-Daniel only denied by a despairing tap tackle.

Tim Molenaar was on the pitch by now and impressed with a couple of powerful breaks and Simpson-Daniel nearly put the game to bed but couldn't quite hang on to an interception.

However, the Ospreys snatched the game after a crucial break from Tom Isaacs although the move finished in controversy as the scoring pass to Dan Biggar looked to be clearly forward. Referee Owens hesitated and consulted his touch judge but allowed the score to stand. Biggar converted to put the Ospreys decisively in front at 22-16.