

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2009

KINGSHOLM – PREMIERSHIP

GLOUCESTER EARN WEST COUNTRY BRAGGING RIGHTS

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 24 BATH RUGBY 5

Match Report by Duncan Wood

Gloucester got their 2009-10 Guinness Premiership season off to the best possible start as they defeated Bath by 24 points to 5 with James Simpson-Daniel claiming two tries.

In front of nearly 13,000 passionate supporters at Kingsholm, it was the perfect opener for Bryan Redpath as Head Coach.

Debutant fly half Nicky Robinson won the Man of the Match nomination from the watching Sky commentators but it was a performance where not one single man let the team down.

The pack were fired up with Andrew Hazell in the faces of the Bath back row all afternoon and young second row Dave Attwood giving a performance that belied his lack of Premiership experience.

Behind the scrum, Lawson and Robinson provided the control whilst all the outside backs looked threatening with Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu in particular looking to prove a point against his old club.

It may not have been the end-to-end classic that took place here last season but there was still passion in every collision and the four points will be welcomed.

It all added up to an afternoon to remember at Kingsholm. The challenge is to kick on from here.

Gloucester were given an early let off as Bath knocked on in midfield but were turned over as Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu looked to counter. Gloucester were caught offside but Ryan Davis pushed his kick wide of the uprights.

There followed a nervous few minutes as both sides probed for an opening and errors were frequent with, finally, Joe Maddock punished for fumbling an up and under on 9 minutes.

His team mates, running back in support, played the ball in an offside position and Nicky Robinson slotted an easy penalty.

Ryan Davis had a chance to level matters five minutes later as Andy Hazell was ruled offside at a ruck but was again wide right.

Gloucester powered downfield and Joe Maddock was caught in possession in his own 22 fielding a through kick. The winger was stripped of the ball and the Gloucester forwards muscled their way forward with Dave Attwood prominent.

Eventually, Bath ran out of numbers and Robinson's long pass found Fuimaono-Sapolu who transferred on to the unmarked James Simpson-Daniel to score. Robinson converted for 10-0 after 18 minutes.

It had been a rocky few minutes for Bath and they didn't help their own cause as they were caught in front of the kicker at the restart.

Gloucester looked to force home their advantage and enjoyed some good time in the Bath 22 but were let down by small handling errors.

However, the second nearly came on 28 minutes as Charlie Sharples came into midfield off his wing and linked up with Simpson-Daniel who jinked inside and was driven over the line by his support but the ball was held up off the ground. From the 5m scrum, Gloucester carved Bath open with a well worked run around between Robinson and Fuimaono-Sapolu but Tom Voyce couldn't gather the ball and knocked on with an unmarked Sharples outside him.

Bath dug deep and weathered the storm and had another penalty chance on 36 minutes as Fuimaono-Sapolu was offside in midfield but Davis dragged his kick left of the posts on this occasion.

With time ticking down and half time approaching, Gloucester were then dealt their first real blow as Andy Hazell was sinbinned for stamping with a Bath player on the wrong side of a ruck.

It proved to be the last action of the half as Gloucester played out the final few minutes and went into the interval with a well-deserved lead.

The next score would prove to be crucial with Bath bound to hit back in the opening stages with Gloucester still down to 14 men and Bryan Redpath's first Guinness Premiership half time team talk would be crucial.

And Bath started well with Nick Abendanon counter attacking well and making good ground. Gloucester were penalised at the ruck and then a further 10 metres for not retreating.

Davis declined the kick at goal and Bath went for the corner but a promising backs move ground to a halt when Abendanon was called for crossing.

Robinson was then just off target with a penalty attempt of his own before Hazell returned whilst Mike Tindall limped out of the action to be replaced by Tim Molenaar, a late call up when Apo Satala failed to complete the warm up.

Then came a pivotal moment. Bath threatened as Julian Salvi burst clear and rampaged into the Gloucester 22. He was hauled down but the ball went loose as Bath recycled and James Simpson-Daniel gathered to sprint all the way from his own 22. Robinson converted and Gloucester had some daylight at 17-0.

Bath hit back and piled on the pressure forcing a couple of 5m lineouts and a 5m scrum but the Gloucester defence dug deep and a loose pass in midfield relieved the pressure.

However, Bath, buoyed by a triple replacement in the pack, weren't done with the catch and drive and rumbled over on 63 minutes with a pile of bodies forcing referee Andrew Small to go to the TMO who ruled that a try hadn't been scored.

Bath scrummaged again but opted to go wide and Maddock's offload was picked off by Tom Voyce but the fullback didn't quite have the gas and the cover got back.

However, Bath weren't done and a neat backs move down the Gloucester left resulted in Shontayne Hape scrambling his way over with the Kingsholm faithful calling for a forward pass. Carraro missed with his conversion but Bath had hope with 13 minutes to play.

Gloucester had an immediate chance to hit back as Robinson drilled a gem of a kick into the Bath corner but the 5m lineout was overthrown and Bath cleared.

Bath kept plugging away but the final nail in the coffin came when Robinson picked off another loose pass and returned it from distance for the third try before converting his own effort.

24-5 the final score and a much-deserved victory for Gloucester.

JC