

THE CITIZEN

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MADEJSKI STADIUM – GUINNESS PREMIERSHIP

BACK TO EARTH WITH A BUMP FOR GLOUCESTER
AT THE MADEJSKI

LONDON IRISH 40 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 10

Match Report by Duncan Wood

Nothing went right for Gloucester Rugby on a wretched afternoon at the Madejski Stadium as they saw four men sent to the sin bin and former fly half Ryan Lamb help himself to a 20 point haul in a 40-10 win for London Irish.

They say a week is a long time in politics but it can be equally as long a time in professional rugby.

After the highlight of the win over Bath last weekend, today was a horror show for the Cherry and Whites.

Irish can tear any side to shreds when their confidence is high and, with Gloucester losing four men to the sin bin during the game, they sensed blood.

Gloucester competed gamely but just weren't clinical enough when they had possession. This gave Irish the upper hand and they took full advantage.

Having to chase the game due to the yellow cards, Gloucester were left stretched in defence as a result and having to make more tackles than they would have liked. Tired bodies couldn't maintain this and the home team clinched their bonus point just before the end.

There was no denying that Irish were the better side today and well worthy of their win. What Gloucester have to do now is learn the lessons of today and bounce back in style against Northampton next weekend.

Having been treated to the pre match 'entertainment' of Stavros Flatley's Irish dancing, it was Gloucester who initially settled quickly. Nicky Robinson cleared long from the kick off and Gloucester won a penalty on the floor after Irish claimed the lineout.

Robinson was only a couple of metres inside the Irish half, and on the angle, but nailed a confident kick to put Gloucester 3-0 ahead after only three minutes.

Former Gloucester fly half Ryan Lamb had a chance to level matters just two minutes later as Scott Lawson was penalised for holding on but his kick stayed just right of the posts.

Gloucester then had a scare as a quick tap penalty caught them napping and Tagicakibau made quick ground and slipped Charlie Sharples' tackle but Olly Morgan put him into touch just 5 metres short of the Gloucester line.

Storm duly weathered, Gloucester moved downfield and patiently worked their way through several phases before Rory Lawson made a sniping break into the heart of the Irish 22 only to lose the ball forward in contact.

However, a miscommunication at the base of a Gloucester scrum moments later had the defence in tatters as Chris Hala'ufia broke away.

The big number eight was hauled down in the 22 but Irish had numbers out wide. However, Lamb's floated cross kick was dropped by Delon Armitage with the line beckoning.

Gloucester hacked clear but were penalised just inside their own half and Lamb was on target to make the score 3-3 after 13 minutes.

The Gloucester lineout was being put under pressure as the game neared the midway point of the first half and the team was having to work hard in defence with Irish momentum building.

Gloucester needed to settle things down and Robinson put the home team under pressure with a fine kick into the home 22 leading to Hala'ufia being penalised for obstruction. Unfortunately, Robinson couldn't finish things off as his kick stayed left of the posts.

And Gloucester were promptly punished as Irish broke from their 22. Swift hands put Tagicakibau into space and his grubber bounced awkwardly to elude Rory Lawson and Morgan and sit up nicely for Delon Armitage to score the game's opening try. Lamb converted for a 10-3 lead after 24 minutes.

It was a blow for Gloucester although they had a chance to hit straight back but Robinson's long range penalty stayed just wide of the posts.

It had been a difficult spell for Gloucester and they were opened up again by Lamb's smart inside pass to Hala'ufia who romped into the 22. Gloucester were caught offside in the backs as the ball was recycled and Lamb kicked an easy penalty for 13-3 after 32 minutes.

Things were going against Gloucester and Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu seemed to be harshly ruled to have knocked on in his own 22. It was backs to the wall in defence and Charlie Sharples was yellow carded for tackling his man without the ball with a score threatening. Lamb kicked his third penalty for a 16-3 lead.

Gloucester, a man down in the backs, were now outgunned behind the scrum. Seveali'i made the initial break before quick hands left gave Armitage the chance to free Tagicakibau who powered his way to the line despite Morgan's last ditch tackle. Lamb rubbed salt into the wound with a touchline conversion. 23-3 with a couple of minutes to go until half time.

After a promising start, Gloucester had been blown away during a purple patch lasting 15 minutes by the home side. Irish hadn't put a foot wrong and gleefully exploited any Gloucester errors for a deserved half time lead.

Bryan Redpath's half time team talk was going to be crucial with some serious momentum turning required and the Head Coach took immediate action as he introduced Nick Wood, Pierre Capdevielle and James Simpson-Daniel for Dickinson, Somerville and Molenaar respectively.

However, it was Irish who understandably came out with their tails up. With Lamb at the helm, the ball was switched left and right until Nick Wood stopped his former team mate with a high tackle on the Gloucester 22. Lamb dusted himself off to make the score 26-3.

With Sharples back from the sin bin, Gloucester had equal numbers again and sought to chase the game with Robinson now instructed to kick for the corners rather than the posts.

Gloucester tried a couple of catch and drives but Irish held out although number eight Chris Hala'ufia was yellow carded for coming in at the side. Akapusi Qera, now on for Hazell, almost powered his way over but was stopped inches short to sum up the team's fortunes to that point.

And, as if to emphasise that point, when Rory Lawson made a 30 metre break after a turnover on halfway, the support couldn't quite get to him and the scrum half was penalised for holding on.

Perhaps Irish had switched off slightly mentally but Gloucester kept going and, on the hour, Morgan's pass gave Charlie Sharples half a yard and the winger broke Paul Hodgson's tackle to score with Robinson's conversion narrowing the gap to 26-10.

As a result, Irish came back strongly and pushed Gloucester back into their own 22 and into a series of defensive scrums. After several infringements, referee Dean Richards lost patience and sent Akapusi Qera to the sin bin but Gloucester kept their line intact.

Nicky Robinson came perilously close to picking off his second interception in two weeks but, when Pierre Capdevielle was also sinbinned for coming through a lineout, the writing was on the wall and Irish were awarded a penalty try as the six man Gloucester scrum buckled. Lamb converted for 33-10.

And the final insult came as there was still time for Tagicakibau to dance his way around tired Gloucester tacklers for the bonus point try and Lamb to add the extras.

Frustration overcame over Gloucester and a brawl erupted with time almost up as Dave Lewis was levelled off the ball and skipper Gareth Delve became the fourth man to see yellow along with Irish replacement George Stowers to cap a very bad day at the office for Gloucester.

JC