

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2009**

**KINGSHOLM – GUINNESS PREMIERSHIP**

**SAINTS MARCH OFF WITH POINTS AS GLOUCESTER DISAPPOINT**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 14 NORTHAMPTON SAINTS 27**

**Match Report by Duncan Wood**

Gloucester slipped to a grim 14-27 home defeat on Saturday afternoon as Northampton Saints came to Kingsholm and delivered a professional performance to earn the win.

The crowd were treated to the proverbial game of two halves as the first period produced some entertaining rugby from both sides and the majority of the points scored.

However, the second half was distinctly more attritional as Northampton stretched the lead in the early stages and then set out everything on the line in defence to keep an increasingly frustrated Gloucester at bay.

Needing two scores for the win, Bryan Redpath's men spent virtually the whole of the final quarter in the Saints 22 but had to turn down kicks to goal in search of tries.

A week after seeing four of their own receive yellow cards, the Gloucester followers were frustrated that a high penalty count against the Saints in this period get no reward either in the form of a sin-binning or a penalty try.

Momentum in sport is a strange thing and Gloucester will look back on the moment they took the lead just before half time only to hand it straight back to Northampton. What if, they may well ask?

Gloucester also will rue their indiscipline and the chances they created but wasted. However, no-one could deny that Northampton were worthy winners on the day.

Gloucester were dealt a blow even before kick off as James Simpson-Daniel was taken unwell overnight. Tom Voyce took over on the wing with Charlie Sharples coming in on the bench.

Saints started impressively with a controlled maul from their pack which made good ground before Gloucester were able to halt it and Jon Clarke returned a kick with interest. However, feverish Gloucester defence forced the Saints back and won a penalty.

Gloucester's first attacking move saw Lesley Vainikolo come into the line off his wing and draw in tacklers. His offload freed Olly Morgan who was dragged down just metres short. Akapusi Qera came similarly close near the left touchline but Saints infringed. However, Robinson's penalty shaved the wrong side of the upright.

And Gloucester were caught cold as Saints moved downfield after Gareth Delve's misplaced pass forced a hurried kick from Tom Voyce, offloading out of the tackle with ease and Soane Tonga-uiha after an initial break from Bonorino slipped a tackle to cross for the game's first try. Geraghty converted for a 0-7 lead.

A chance to bounce back went begging as a lineout was lost against the throw and Reihana twisted the knife as he landed a penalty from half way as Gloucester were caught offside to open a 0-10 lead.

Gloucester's reply was impressive as they stretched the Saints defence and Mike Tindall looked to have sprung the defence as he re-gathered his own grubber kick but the ball went marginally forward as he offloaded with a score seemingly on the cards.

A series of messy scrums followed with Gloucester awarded a penalty as the Saints front row slipped their bind and Robinson opened the home account with a well struck penalty.

Gloucester then capped a good spell of possession with their own try. Nicky Robinson gathered a loose clearance and fed Vainikolo who powered through the first tackle. Robinson was in support and his pass gave Qera just enough room to power over in the corner. Robinson hooked his conversion but Gloucester were back in the game at 8-10.

Geraghty responded with a 26th minute penalty when Gloucester came offside at a lineout but Robinson cancelled it out two minutes later as Northampton offended at a ruck, although he was off target from distance on 31 minutes.

The Saints defence was being kept on their toes by a series of measured grubber kicks and the pressure resulted in a penalty on 35 minutes which Robinson slotted to nudge Gloucester in front at 14-13 only for obstruction to be called as Mike Tindall took the restart and Geraghty made it 14-16.

Gloucester then almost paid the price for an overthrown defensive lineout as Saints flanker gathered and was halted just a metre short. However, Geraghty extended the lead as time expired with his third penalty as Gloucester took the man out at a lineout.

An entertaining first half thus came to a close with Gloucester regretting the soft early try they conceded and the lapses of discipline that had cost them dear in the first period.

In between, Gloucester had played some seriously good rugby and further tries looked likely. However, patience and execution would be required in the second half.

Gloucester's back three was further disrupted during the break as Olly Morgan failed to reappear. Tom Voyce moved to full back and Charlie Sharples took over on the wing.

And, frustratingly, a messy five minutes after the break saw a few decisions go against Gloucester but Geraghty wasted a good chance to add to the Northampton lead as he missed a very kickable penalty.

However, Geraghty quickly made amends as his break from halfway tore open the home defence and it was only a matter of time before Saints scored with Foden eventually releasing Jon Clarke to score in the corner.

Robinson had a chance to immediately respond but was wide with a penalty as the tension started to mount and the Shed became more vocal.

Saints had the upper hand with Gloucester looking a little flat and Head Coach Bryan Redpath responded with a triple substitution as he introduced Olivier Azam, Alasdair Strokosch and Rory Lawson.

Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu almost broke clear but couldn't keep his feet and referee David Rose incurred the wrath of the Kingsholm crowd with a number of decisions against the home side with Bruce Reihana landing another long-range kick for 14-27.

Gloucester came back hard but got little change out of a well drilled Saints defence who were also making life increasingly uncomfortable around the breakdown area.

With the game going into the final 10 minutes, Gloucester resorted to a little old-fashioned brawn and almost muscled their way over but, when the ball was moved wide, Mike Tindall was hit hard in the tackle and spilled the ball.

The Gloucester pack disrupted the Saints scrum and Rory Lawson forced a turnover to give the home side a glimmer but Tom Voyce was halted in his tracks as he came in on an inside line.

It was desperate defence by Northampton and they conceded penalty after penalty but no card or penalty try was forthcoming.

The game petered out and the Northampton players were able to celebrate in front of their travelling support whilst Gloucester will go back to the drawing board and attempt to regroup ahead of the trip to Saracens next weekend.

JC