

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2009

HEADINGLEY CARNEGIE – GUINNESS PREMIERSHIP

GLOUCESTER FORCED TO DIG DEEP TO EARN LEEDS WIN

LEEDS CARNEGIE 10 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 26

Match Report by Duncan Wood

Gloucester made very hard work of things at a sunny Headingley on Sunday afternoon relying on three second half tries from Olivier Azam, James Simpson-Daniel and Mike Tindall to finally subdue a spirited Leeds outfit, 26-10.

Three tries was a poor return considering the amount of possession that Gloucester enjoyed but, time and again, an opening was fashioned but not finished.

The effort was disrupted by injuries but the handling and passing on a perfectly dry day would have disappointed all concerned.

And, the worst possible mistake was allowing Leeds to score early as it gave them momentum and self-belief and made them even more difficult to break down.

But Bryan Redpath's men did stick at it and finally got over the whitewash to get the scores to clinch the game and a morale boosting victory ahead of Friday's Heineken Cup opener.

Gloucester got off to a good start as they reclaimed the opening kick-off and then forced an offside penalty out of the Leeds defence. However, Nicky Robinson, from wide out on the right, pushed his kick across the posts.

And Leeds then stunned the Cherry and Whites as Marco Wentzel took an inside pass and burst through the Gloucester midfield before finding the supporting Tom Denton in support who had just enough reach to make the line. Ceiron Thomas converted for a 7-0 scoreline after only 4 minutes.

The home team were visibly lifted but Nicky Robinson got Gloucester straight onto the scoreboard with a penalty after Mike Tindall forced a turnover in midfield.

Robinson was using the up and under to good effect and another well placed kick gave Gloucester a great attacking position with a set scrum in front of the posts but Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu couldn't hang on when he looked to be through a gap.

To add insult to injury, the Samoan was then helped off the pitch to be replaced by Olly Morgan.

Gloucester were starting to look dangerous and Simpson-Daniel so nearly burst clear but was hauled down just yards short of the line. Leeds killed the ball and Robinson kicked the penalty which was promptly cancelled out by Thomas as Gloucester held onto the ball from the restart. 10-6 after 16 minutes.

Gloucester needed a score to settle but the Leeds defence was proving tough to break down and, every time Lesley Vainikolo touched the ball, he attracted a swarm of tacklers.

It was fairly uninspiring stuff but Gloucester finally showed some spark when James Simpson-Daniel made a half break on the left and Olly Morgan took the offload but the support was just too slow and Leeds scrambled back to thwart the move.

However, the Gloucester pack promptly destroyed the ensuing Leeds scrum and Hendrie Fourie was sinbinned as Leeds killed the ball in desperation but Robinson's penalty was wide of the mark.

Gloucester were pressing but perhaps a little over eager and handling errors were disrupting the momentum as evidenced by Rory Lawson losing the ball in contact after another break by Simpson-Daniel.

Matters weren't helped as Olly Morgan limped off as half time approached but Redpath's men still pressed for the go ahead score only to be let down by poor execution and went into the break trailing by 10 points to 6.

In truth, it had been a poor half of rugby but the Leeds crowd were getting behind their side who were working valiantly in defence.

The Gloucester pack had the upper hand in the scrums and Simpson-Daniel could have had a hat trick on another day but a big second performance would be required and a few calm heads.

The second half got off to a dramatic start as Freddie Burns caught a high ball, chipped ahead and then hacked on. The full back may well have got to the ball but was held back by Ceiron Thomas who was sinbinned. However, Leeds escaped as the ball just ran dead and Gloucester couldn't capitalise.

Nervous minutes ticked by but, finally, Gloucester resorted to keeping the ball tight and, after several phases, Olivier Azam bludgeoned his way over and Robinson's conversion gave Gloucester a 10-13 lead.

Gaps suddenly opened and Tindall's pacy break from the restart took him clear and Simpson-Daniel was on hand to finish to settle a few nerves.

Leeds were far from done, however, and still capable of making life uncomfortable for Gloucester going into the final quarter and thought they'd carved an opening for Lee Blackett only to be called back for crossing.

Gloucester couldn't hang on to enough meaningful possession to get the next score to put the game away meaning that, with 10 minutes remaining, Leeds were still in the game and Gloucester nerves jangling.

Robinson extended the lead to 21-10 with a penalty from long range to take the game a bit further away from Leeds and Tindall's try from distance finished it off.

JC