

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2009

PARC DES SPORTS AGUILÉRA – HEINEKEN CUP

GLOUCESTER UNABLE TO CONTAIN NGWENYA AS BIARRITZ WIN

BIARRITZ OLYMPIQUE PAYS BASQUE 42 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 15

Match Report by Duncan Wood

After a promising opening half hour, Gloucester were blown away by the pace and power of Biarritz right winger Takudzwa Ngwenya whose finishing skills proved pivotal in turning the game the way of the Frenchmen.

The USA Sevens speedster made a crucial intervention with two superb solo scores as Gloucester looked set to go into the half time break well in touch.

It had been a spirited first half display to this point and, despite the lively orchestra in the stand, there were the beginnings of murmurs of discontent in the stands at Parc des Sports Aguilera.

But Ngwenya's contributions gave Biarritz the self-belief to kick on and duly wrap up the victory in the second half with the winger completing a dynamic hat trick on the way.

Bryan Redpath's men were far from disgraced and no-one could accuse his side of not fronting up. However, on the day, Biarritz simply had too many big-name players in key positions and ruthlessly took their chances.

Gloucester can take heart from testing Biarritz and didn't appear to lose any more players to injury so will hopefully bounce back to winning ways next weekend.

But, in the cold light of day, Biarritz have taken a firm grip of pool B in the Heineken Cup although they still have to come to Kingsholm of course.

In perfect conditions, Nicky Robinson got the game underway by kicking long but the home team were quickly into their stride, offloading well.

Gloucester repelled the opening salvo but conceded a penalty for holding on which Dimitri Yachvili slotted for a 3-0 lead after 2 minutes.

The opening stages were a contrast in styles with Biarritz confidently keeping the ball in hand whereas Nicky Robinson was testing the home defence with a series of kicks.

Gloucester's first foray into the Biarritz 22 was from a controlled catch and drive followed by some patient phase play leading to a penalty opportunity for Robinson which the Welsh international nailed for 3-3 after 9 minutes.

Gloucester were evidently boosted and a smart passage of play followed with Qera showing his physicality and slick hands through the backs but a turnover followed and Damien Traille's boot pinned Gloucester deep into their own 22.

The lines were cleared but, from the resulting line out, Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu was ruled offside in midfield and Yachvili restored the home lead at 6-3.

Gloucester responded well and Fuimaono-Sapolu and Robinson combined to give James Simpson-Daniel some running room but the support wasn't quite there.

Qera then marauded downfield and Biarritz seemed to have half a dozen men offside as the ball was recycled but referee Alan Lewis gave nothing.

Biarritz survived and almost extended their lead as Yachvili attempted a penalty from inside his own half but was short and wide with his attempt. A spell of home pressure ensued but the Gloucester defence was up to the mark and Traille's mis-hit drop goal was well off target.

It was a key spell of the game and Biarritz looked to up the tempo and cut open the Gloucester midfield as Harinordoquy and Traille combined to free Nicolas Brusque. Andrew Hazell got back to make the tackle but was penalised for competing at the breakdown and yellow carded with Yachvili adding a simple penalty for 9-3.

Down to 14 men, Gloucester needed to regroup but Yachvili's chip through eluded Robinson to create panic in the ranks but the immediate danger was quashed.

In fact, the effort being put in at this point was nothing short of magnificent as Hazell's minutes in the bin ticked away but it took a superb last-ditch tackle on Harinordoquy to keep the line intact.

However, it was all in vain as speedster Ngwenya took a pass in midfield and, with seemingly nothing on, slipped Simpson-Daniel's tackle before accelerating smoothly around Voyce to score the game's first try.

It almost got worse as full back Bosch broke clear after Yachvili outwitted Dave Lewis but Ngwenya then produced another piece of magic as he caught his own chip ahead without breaking stride for his second try. Yachvili converted for 21-3 at half time.

The scoreline was harsh on Gloucester who had more than played their part in the first period and had genuine claims for a penalty at 6-3 turned down but Ngwenya's two contributions in the space of 5 minutes had blown the game wide open.

The second half was going to be a massive test of character for Bryan Redpath's men but just one change was made at the interval with the experience of Rory Lawson introduced in place of Dave Lewis.

And Gloucester certainly showed ambition. Nicky Robinson's long lineout gave Charlie Sharples a chance to run from his own line and backs and forwards were linking well as Gloucester tried to take the game to the home side.

But, in terms of the scoreline, bad went to worse as Sharples spilled a ball in midfield, Bosch countered and Ngwenya was on hand to take the inside pass and complete his hat trick. Yachvili converted as Gloucester were brutally punished for the error.

Gloucester rang the changes and Jake Boer was quickly into the thick of things on his much-awaited return but it was Tom Voyce who burrowed over from the side of a ruck to complete some good approach work. 28-8 going into the final quarter.

Biarritz duly clinched their try scoring bonus point as replacement centre Ayoola Erinle took an inside line off Courent and had the pace and power to score. Yachvili's conversion put Biarritz out of sight at 35-8.

Still there was fight in the Gloucester ranks. Freddie Burns almost jinked his way clear but it was flanker Jake Boer who powered over for a popular score to restore some pride. Burns' conversion narrowed the gap to 35-15.

There was enterprise from Gloucester but it was mainly from deep and the afternoon was summed up as Courent's grubber kick eluded several defenders and then sat up nicely for the former Sale fly half to finish things off and complete the misery with Yachvili converting.