

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2009**

**KINGSHOLM – LV= CUP**

**SWEENEY'S BOOT CONDEMNS GLOUCESTER  
TO LAST MINUTE DEFEAT**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 25 CARDIFF BLUES 26**

**Match Report by Duncan Wood**

Ceri Sweeney's penalty with less than a minute to play clinched a narrow 26-25 win for the Cardiff Blues in the LV= Cup at a damp and dark Kingsholm on Sunday afternoon.

It was a sad end to an afternoon of honest endeavour as a hand sneaked into a ruck with mere seconds left on the clock and the Blues seemingly not making any real ground. But the penalty was awarded and Sweeney duly bisected the uprights for the Blues to return home with the win.

It ended an afternoon when the lead had changed hands several times in a frenetic second half with neither side able to shake the other half.

Despite the unfavourable conditions, the two sides managed to conjure up an entertaining afternoon of rugby but that will come as little consolation to the home side.

In fact Gloucester will kick themselves for not kicking on when they had a ten point lead midway through the first half and for conceding what they will consider to be two fairly soft tries off first phases possession.

The frustration felt by the Gloucester set up was blatantly obvious on the final whistle but the Gloucester crowd, to their eternal credit, stayed behind to applaud their team. Wasps are next up in the same competition next Sunday and surely Gloucester's luck will turn shortly?

Kick off was proceeded by an impeccably observed minute's silence to observe Remembrance Sunday before the Blues proceeded to dominate possession for the first two minutes.

Gloucester's defence held up well but frustration eventually got the better of Scott Lawson who came in at the side of a ruck and Ceri Sweeny punished the error with well-judged penalty to open the scoring after three minutes.

There was then a further scare for the home side as Freddie Burns had a kick charged down but Rory Lawson got back brilliantly to rescue a dangerous situation.

Gloucester hadn't really settled into their game and were subjected to a period of intense pressure in their own 22 as the Blues kept it tight and showed excellent ball retention but the defence was up to the task in hand.

Gloucester's first promising spell of the game duly followed with prop Greg Somerville showing up well with a couple of strong ball carries but Will James' hands let him down.

However, the pack then ruined a Cardiff scrum to claim possession and Nicky Robinson was given a chance to level matters as the Blues infringed at a ruck on the 22 in front of their posts and the former Blue made no mistake. 3-3 after 14 minutes.

And Gloucester then moved immediately into the lead. Freddie Burns' well-judged kick put Cardiff back near their own line and the pack turned over the lineout and Adam Eustace showed superb strength to touch down. Robinson's conversion hit the post but Gloucester were up 8-3.

And the second try followed at once to send Kingsholm into raptures. Robinson took the restart and broke from deep, well supported by Eustace and Simpson-Daniel. The ball was recycled and Trinder's grubber kick almost found Vainikolo but Gareth Delve followed up to touch down. 13-3 after 17 minutes.

Frustratingly, it was Robinson's last contribution as he left the pitch to be replaced by Carlos Spencer whilst Burns was off target with the conversion.

It had been all Gloucester but Cardiff stunned the home side as, from clean lineout ball, Xavier Rush smashed through the Gloucester midfield defence and then had enough strength to ride Burns' tackle and touch down under the posts. Sweeney's easy conversion brought the Blues right back into things at 13-10 after 27 minutes. It provoked a furious response from the home side and Simpson-Daniel almost grabbed the third Gloucester try but his chip over the top just ran dead.

However, it was Cardiff who were next to score as Sweeney added a straightforward penalty after Richie Rees's smart blindside break caught Gloucester napping.

And Gloucester were caught cold from the restart as Cardiff took the ball, broke a tackle and marauded downfield. Alasdair Strokosch disrupted the ruck and was promptly yellow carded but Sweeney missed the opportunity to nudge Cardiff ahead.

14 man Gloucester responded well and Carlos Spencer was starting to show some nifty footwork with the reward being a Burns' penalty after 38 minutes to lift the crowd.

There was still time for some Cardiff pressure but the half time whistle blew with no further addition to the scoreline after an entertaining half of rugby and both teams still in the hunt.

And Cardiff were quicker out of the blocks as Gloucester lost their own lineout ball and Deiniol Jones rampaged into the home 22 but Chris Czejak knocked on when well placed.

Spencer then knocked on near his own line to cause alarm bells to ring but the Gloucester pack bailed him out with a big defensive effort and some sustained possession led to a second penalty from Burns to increase the lead to 19-13.

However, Sweeney cancelled that out four minutes later as Lesley Vainikolo couldn't hold on to Spencer's inside pass and Dave Attwood inadvertently picked up the ball in an offside position.

The Blues sensed that this might be their time to pounce and promptly stepped up a gear with Gareth Thomas almost muscling his way through after gathering a Sweeney chip over the top.

The defence held but, from the 5m scrum, Sam Norton-Knight took the ball at pace and stepped his way through against the drift to score. Sweeney's conversion gave the Blues a 19-23 lead going into the final quarter.

Gloucester needed a response and it was so nearly provided by Carlos Spencer with a wonderful mazy run but his pass was picked off by a retreating Blues player.

The clearance downfield was fielded by Burns but he was collared by Gareth Thomas and held on in the tackle.

Sweeney hooked his penalty attempt but Burns was injured in the challenge. Gloucester had run out of backs replacements meaning Apo Satala came on for the full back.

A tactical kicking game ensued as the tension grew and Gloucester came out on top as Spencer slotted a 67th minute period to make the score 22-23 and all to play for.

With the game breaking up, Spencer was becoming increasingly influential and his half break led to the scrum which gave Gloucester another shot at goal on 70 minutes. The former All Black stepped up and kicked the home side into the lead.

There was still time for the Blues to respond and they kicked boldly to the corner in search of the win and were just held up over the line. Desperate defence was called for and it duly followed to the delight of the home crowd.

With time ticking away, the Blues spun the ball left and right in an attempt to conjure up the go ahead score and Gloucester finally gave away a penalty on their own 10m line for hands in the ruck.

Sweeney came forward and broke Gloucester hearts with the penalty for a 25-26 scoreline and the win.

JC