

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2009

KINGSHOLM – GUINNESS PREMIERSHIP

BURNS NIGHT COMES EARLY AT KINGSHOLM

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 12 LEICESTER TIGERS 9

Match Report by Duncan Wood

He wasn't originally named in the starting XV but two penalties and two drop goals from the boot of Freddie Burns were enough to earn Gloucester a memorable and much needed win over Leicester Tigers on Friday evening.

It wasn't a feast of running rugby. In fact, it was like a Gloucester victory of old. Conditions far from perfect, with the pack putting in a herculean up front to lay the platform for victory.

Burns will make the headlines and rightly so but, on the night, every single man wearing the Cherry and White shirt ran until his blood turned to water for the cause.

In a season where wins have been hard to come by recently, it genuinely looked as though this one would slip away again.

Having dominated the second half, Gloucester went into the final couple of minutes with only a slim 12-9 lead.

Ben Youngs missed a kickable penalty which would have levelled matters and, with no time left on the clock, it seemed as though former Gloucester favourite Anthony Allen would put Lote Tuqiri into the corner. But the pass was low, knocked on, and Kingsholm erupted in relief and joy.

For all the jubilation at the final whistle, the evening started with a sense of foreboding as Gloucester were forced to reshuffle even before the game had kicked off.

A quick look through the match programme revealed that Gloucester were missing 14 internationals coming into the game either due to injury, international call ups or suspension.

Incredibly, that became 17 by the time the game kicked off with Nicky Robinson (groin) and James Simpson-Daniel (dead leg) failing late fitness tests and Olly Morgan pulling out during the warm up.

Yet Gloucester appeared unfazed by the late changes in the early stages as they took the game to the Tigers although Charlie Sharples did have to deal smartly with one canny chip through from Jordan Crane with Lote Tuqiri lurking.

The Tigers continued to look dangerous and Allen's inside pass to Ben Youngs almost carved Gloucester open but the defence held at the expense of a 5m scrum as Sharples had to carry the ball over his own line as he defended another grubber.

The Tigers eight got a squeeze on from the resulting scrum and Gloucester were forced to concede a penalty which Staunton slotted with ease to open the scoring. 0-3 after 12 minutes.

To their credit, Gloucester came straight back, turning the Tigers over in midfield and moving menacingly into the visitors' 22. Molenaar and Vainikolo supported the pack with some powerful ball carrying and a penalty eventually came from which Burns levelled the scores.

Backed by a vociferous Kingsholm crowd, Gloucester kept up the momentum with the forwards forcing Leicester to collapse a maul just outside the Tigers' 22. It wasn't straightforward but Burns kicked the penalty with aplomb to give Gloucester a 6-3 lead after 20 minutes.

The Tigers responded well and won a penalty as Gloucester came in at the side of a ruck but Staunton's non kicking foot slipped as he went for the posts and his penalty attempt swerved wide.

The Gloucester pack were enjoying superiority in the tight with the driving maul getting results and a long period of pressure in the Tigers' 22 resulted in a drop goal for Burns with referee Davey playing advantage.

But the 9-3 lead quickly became 9-6 as Staunton kicked a penalty after Gloucester were caught napping from the restart with the Tigers re-gathering and forcing the infringement.

With half time approaching, Gloucester thought they had sprung Vainikolo into space after Dave Attwood snatched a Tigers' lineout and Henry Trinder nailed Scott Hamilton after the full back caught a high ball but, to the dismay of the crowd, a forward pass was called.

Again, however, the pack rose to the occasion and forced a penalty on the Tigers' put in, but Burns' kick hit the left upright and stayed out.

Referee Davey blew for half time with Gloucester just edging it at 9-6, a lead deserved simply because of the passion and commitment displayed by a hastily re-arranged team.

It hadn't been a classic – there were too many errors for that. But Gloucester had given their crowd plenty to cheer about.

And there was more to cheer about at the start of the second period as Gloucester kept the Tigers pinned back with a series of well-judged kicks, one a beauty from Voyce, until Will James nicked a Tigers throw, Nick Wood powered on and Burns dropped his second goal of the night for 12-6.

Sadly, Staunton responded within minutes with his third penalty of the evening as Gloucester were adjudged to have come in at the side of a maul. 12-9 after 46 minutes.

Gloucester then dodged a bullet as Voyce was caught in his own 22 fielding a canny kick from Tuqiri. The turnover came but Youngs' pass went straight into touch to let the home side off the hook.

Burns had cramped up and been replaced by Carlos Spencer and the former All Black inspired a thrilling counter attack from his own half which promised much but resulted in no addition to the score as the tension rose.

A great kick pinned Tuqiri back near his own line and the former Australian international was caught by Charlie Sharples and Dave Attwood and forced to hold on. Gloucester boldly went for the corner but lost possession. A second kick to the corner followed shortly after but the throw was deemed not straight.

Dave Lewis then opened up the Tigers with a searing break following lineout ball off the top but his grubber was well fielded by John Murphy under extreme pressure. Still the Tigers held and the score remained 12-9 going into the final quarter.

Nick Wood, who had scrummaged and carried until he had no more in the tank, left the field to a hero's ovation and Paul Doran-Jones promptly picked up where he left off.

Dave Lewis almost jinked his way through again and Gloucester hammered away at the Tigers' line. But the visitors' defence was magnificent with the forwards putting their bodies on the line time and again.

Leicester cleared and looked to have escaped but Vainikolo and Molenaar linked superbly to drive into the visitors' 22 only for Scott Hamilton to kill the ball. The full back was yellow carded but Spencer's penalty from wide out was short and wide.

And, incredibly, as Leicester moved into the Gloucester half for the first time in seemingly an age, they earned a penalty just outside the Gloucester 10m line but Ben Youngs hooked the kick to the glee of the crowd.

It was now Gloucester under real pressure as Leicester fought like demons to level the score. The Tigers had spent nigh on 35 minutes of the second half defending and yet still had energy to stretch the home defence.

As time expired, a two on one was conjured up. Anthony Allen looked to draw the last man but his pass to Tuqiri was way too low and the big winger fumbled it forward with the line gaping.

Will this be the shot in arm that Gloucester's season needs?
Has Gloucester's luck finally turned?

Only time will tell but it was a great night in GL1!

JC