

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2009

TWICKENHAM STOOP – GUINNESS PREMIERSHIP

GLOUCESTER EDGED OUT IN THRILLER AT THE STOOP

HARLEQUINS 35 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 29

Match Report by Duncan Wood

Gloucester more than played their part in a 64-point thriller at the Stoop on Saturday afternoon but were edged out 35-29, paying the price for tries conceded either side of half time.

Gloucester had the better of the first and final quarters but three tries in 12 minutes either side of the interval were the crucial factor as Quins took the spoils from a game which neither defence will be particularly proud of.

At 32-16 on 51 minutes, Gloucester were on the verge of capitulating but dug deep and almost pulled off a superb and unlikely comeback.

However, the main difference on the day was Danny Care who inspired Quins when they needed it and was deservedly named Man of the Match.

Gloucester will head home with a losing bonus point but it could have been so much more.

A clear, cold and crisp day beckoned at the Twickenham Stoop with little chance of the game being called off due to a waterlogged pitch.

Quins started at a furious pace, aided by Gloucester dropping the opening kick-off. A quick line out gave Mike Brown a chance to break tackles in midfield and a hastily taken tap penalty almost put Ugo Monye clear.

However, the Gloucester pack looked bang on form and forced a free kick from a Quins set scrum and also nicked an early lineout to ease the pressure. However, bad luck struck as Will James was stretchered off to sympathetic applause after only six minutes.

The pack may have been mentally shaken but they didn't show it as they forced Quins to collapse a scrum immediately afterwards but Burns' penalty struck the upright.

The chasing Charlie Sharples gathered the rebound and set up a period of pressure which resulted in a far easier penalty for Burns and he made no mistake. 0-3 after nine minutes.

Gloucester had to withstand some pressure but stunned the home crowd with a try on 15 minutes. A Burns' up and under saw Brown caught by Simpson-Daniel and Voyce. The turnover saw quick ball moved right and Gareth Delve powered through a gap wide out to score under pressure. Burns couldn't convert but Gloucester had an 8-0 lead.

The lead lasted just four minutes as Danny Care spotted a gap at a ruck in midfield and scampered clear as Gloucester were caught napping. George Lowe took the pass and went under the posts unopposed. Evans' conversion brought the score to 7-8 as a breathless first quarter came to an end.

Gloucester hit straight back turning Quins over in midfield. Quick hands found Sharples whose grubber ahead saw Brown dally and Sharples won the chase to the ball when he seemingly had no chance. 7-13 after the missed conversion.

Credit to Quins who were back on the offensive as Gloucester fumbled the restart. The home side put pace on the ball and a high tackle gave Evans an easy penalty to make the score 10-13 and the fly half made it 13-all just a couple of minutes later as Gloucester were caught offside.

The momentum had gone Quins' way but a high tackle on Tim Molenaar in midfield gave Burns a chance to respond and he bisected the posts to nudge Gloucester back in front.

Gloucester endured some uncomfortable moments approaching half time but looked to have survived until Nick Evans produced a moment of magic to weave his way through a floundering Gloucester back line to dive over and score a great try.

The New Zealander dragged his conversion across the posts but Quins went into the break with an 18-16 lead which would have come as a bitter blow to Gloucester who had led throughout.

However, with Danny Care scampering this way and that and pulling the strings for Quins, the home team had gained the ascendancy and Gloucester would have to respond in order to get back in front.

But Quins came out looking hungry and had Gloucester under the cosh from the off with the likes of Fuga and Easter carrying well and it took strong defence to keep them at bay.

However, it was Care who created the next real scare with a quick free kick followed by a chip and chase. Voyce scampered back but had to hold onto the ball in the tackle and Quins kicked the resulting penalty into the corner.

Gloucester held the initial charge but Care's short pass found Easter on the charge and he crashed through the defensive line to score unhindered and Evans had a simple conversion for a 25-16 lead.

Burns missed a long penalty and Gloucester swiftly introduced Robinson, Lawson and Doran-Jones but Danny Care again opened up Gloucester with a quick tap and Lowe was again the recipient as he scored his second try of the afternoon and secured the bonus point for Quins. Evans' conversion added to the misery.

Robinson wanted his say, however, and kicked a penalty for 32-19 before his long break led to good field position with Quins' James Percival sinbinned for killing the ball.

From the lineout, Robinson's long pass found Simpson-Daniel in space and he floated a lovely pass out to Sharples who crossed for his second. Robinson nailed the conversion for 32-26 as this incredible game continued to ebb and flow.

Sharples almost did Mike Brown for pace as Gloucester found more space after a Simpson-Daniel break and Molenaar thought he'd scored but the inside pass floated forwards. It was frantic stuff.

Quins then took a 35-26 lead as Gloucester conceded a penalty from a scrum near their own line after Gareth Delve was caught retrieving a kick through and Evans made no mistake.

More Gloucester pressure produced a penalty for Robinson to narrow the gap to 35-29 with just four minutes to go as the tension rose with fingernails bitten down to the quick on both sides.

Gloucester threw the kitchen sink at their hosts in the final few minutes in their quest for the match winning score but a strong Quins' counter ruck on their own 10m line effectively ended the challenge with Care gleefully kicking the ball dead to end proceedings.

The losing bonus point is a consolation but Gloucester were so close to a try scoring bonus point and could have taken the win.

It was a frustrating afternoon...

JC