

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2010**

**KINGSHOLM – GUINNESS PREMIERSHIP**

**SALE SWAMPED AS GLOUCESTER ROMP TO WIN**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 47 SALE SHARKS 3**

**Match Report by Duncan Wood**

On a day where the conditions were more akin to mud wrestling than rugby, Gloucester outmuscled and outplayed the Sale Sharks on their way to a 47-3 win.

Torrential rain fell in the couple hours before kick-off leaving the Kingsholm pitch muddy in large areas but the rain had thankfully ceased by the time the game kicked off.

It all pointed to a game where plenty of mistakes were bound to take place and both sets of forwards would have been looking forward to an afternoon of hard work.

And the Gloucester pack made light of the job in hand as they pulverised their counterparts from the off.

The side from Stockport would surely have been used to playing in inclement conditions but they looked like a side with their minds elsewhere.

Having softened up Sale up front, Gloucester showed their ambition by shifting the ball wide when it was on and both wingers made the scoresheet.

The bonus point was in the bag by the half hour and the game inevitably went into something of a lull after that but Gloucester finished strongly and will go into Wasps next weekend in good heart.

Gloucester's forwards looked the stronger early doors but the backs almost carved open the first score as Molenaar and Vainikolo crashed through the middle but the returning Mike Tindall lost the ball in the shadow of the Sale posts.

Gloucester promptly drove Sale off their own scrum ball and Gareth Delve dived over. However, referee Richards came back for a Gloucester scrum to the dismay of the Kingsholm crowd.

The home pack regrouped, and were awarded a penalty try as a hopelessly overpowered Sale scrum collapsed it. Robinson converted for 7-0.

A charged down kick then gave more great field position for Gloucester and they again opted for the scrum as Sale offended.

The Sale pack held up on this occasion but swift hands left created a two on one and Olly Morgan put Lesley Vainikolo in for the second try. Robinson slotted a superb touchline conversion for 14-0 after 12 minutes.

Gloucester's pack were revelling in the conditions and the pressure they created very nearly forced a third score but for a handling error as Molenaar tried to offload to Vainikolo near the line.

Sale were in disarray defensively as Gloucester simply had bigger, heavier men all over the pitch. However, the twinkling toes of Simpson-Daniel led to the next score as he made the key break before Vainikolo muscled his way over for his second.

The bonus point was duly wrapped up on 27 minutes as more pressure led to Akapusi Qera strolling over untouched and, had this been a boxing match, it would have been stopped. Robinson added the extras for 26-0.

Sale's first foray into the Gloucester 22 came when Oriol Ripol followed up his own intelligent chip ahead and caught Rory Lawson in possession

but the Sale pack lost possession from a 5m lineout and then conceded a penalty to concede the position.

Charlie Hodgson duly kicked them back into the 22 and his pack drove powerfully towards the Gloucester line but Hodgson settled for a 39th minute penalty as Gloucester pulled the maul down.

That ended proceedings for the first half and Gloucester could reflect on a job well done thus far.

Sale were bound to bemoan the conditions which, admittedly, were far from perfect. However, it was the same for both sides and Gloucester had been vastly superior in all areas of the game.

Sadly for all concerned, the heavens opened again during the break and a cold, wet second half beckoned with an even higher error count predicted.

Mike Tindall, with 40 minutes under his belt, made way for Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu as Gloucester set about closing out the game.

And the first 10 minutes duly passed in a flurry of turnovers with neither side able to hold onto possession for any sustained period.

The conditions had now deteriorated to such a point that handling was nigh on impossible and clinching the bonus point early now looked to be a good thing.

Moments of quality were rare but Nicky Robinson provided one on 64 minutes as he chipped over the onrushing defence, hacked on and won the chase to score before converting himself to make the score 33-3.

Simpson-Daniel then got the reward for an afternoon of hard work. Fuimaono-Sapolu cut back against the grain to make some space for the winger who chipped ahead and then pounced as Vakacegu fumbled the greasy ball. Tim Taylor slotted the conversion in off the post.

The scoring wasn't over as Andy Hazell took a great line to finish off a break from Tim Taylor to the delight of the Shed. Taylor's conversion took the lead to 47-3.

A second bonus point win in a row for Gloucester at Kingsholm and the momentum is building.

Perhaps the only negative was seeing Greg Somerville leave the action with an arm injury but, overall, spirits will be high.

JC