

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, 27 MARCH, 2010

KINGSHOLM – GUINNESS PREMIERSHIP

GLOUCESTER BATTLE PAST LEEDS IN TOUGH ENCOUNTER

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 19 LEEDS CARNEGIE 0

Match Report by Duncan Wood

The contribution of Nicky Robinson was key on Saturday afternoon as the fly half scored all of Gloucester's points in the 19-0 win over Leeds Carnegie.

After the try fests of the last couple of Guinness Premiership matches at Kingsholm, it was a tense, closely fought encounter with Leeds showing the dogged competitive streak that has made them so difficult to break down.

Gloucester weren't quite on their game. The passing was a little imprecise and possession was coughed up a little too easily for that.

They were also forced to reshuffle as joint captains Mike Tindall (groin) and Gareth Delve (ankle) were both forced to leave the action.

It would be wrong to deny Leeds the credit they deserve. They were well organised in defence and stole countless ball at the breakdown. They also created a couple of chances of their own in attack which, if taken, could have changed the face of the game.

However, a win is a win and four valuable Guinness Premiership points in the bag ahead of Wednesday's tough trip to Newcastle.

Compared to Gloucester's last home game, against Sale a month ago, conditions were nigh on perfect as the game kicked off with a dry surface and the sun shining. Leeds appeared to have the benefit of the wind.

An early kicking duel got things going but Gloucester were quickly looking to spread the ball wide to their wingers.

And the home side were dealt an early blow on six minutes when England centre Mike Tindall limped out of the action and was replaced by Charlie Sharples.

Gloucester had a couple of early threatening moments but didn't really come close and Leeds responded with a good spell showing the confidence inspired by their recent good form.

One prolonged period of possession took Leeds to within inches of the home line as they remained patient and worked the phases until prop Juan Gomez was held up over the line. A 5m scrum followed but the Leeds pack conceded a free kick and Nicky Robinson cleared.

It was a frustrating period for Gloucester as Leeds' simple but effective tactics were keeping the ball away from the home side and the majority of play was in the Gloucester half.

And centre Seru Rabeni almost opened the scoring on 23 minutes as a neat show and go in midfield saw him sprint into the Gloucester 22 where Freddie Burns had to make a try saving tackle cutting down the Fijian in full flight.

Leeds had appeared to be living on the offside line and referee Debney finally picked them up for it on the half hour. To the relief of the home crowd, Robinson opened the scoring with a well struck penalty.

It provoked a much better spell from Gloucester and they finally strung together enough phases to stretch the Leeds defence with James Simpson-Daniel almost side stepping his way to the line.

Leeds did hold out, at the expense of a penalty, and Robinson kicked his second penalty for a 6-0 lead after 34 minutes.

Half time looked as though it would come without any further incident but the Gloucester pack dug deep to drive the Leeds eight off their own scrummage ball to earn another penalty and Robinson curled home a great kick for a 9-0 lead at the interval.

The first half hadn't been a thing of beauty, partly due to Leeds competitiveness and partly due to Gloucester just trying to force things and errors occurring as a result.

The home side had seemed to start slightly flat and there were welcome signs of it all coming together as half time approached but there was still a lot of rugby to play in the second half.

Discipline continued to haunt Leeds right at the start of the second half as they immediately conceded a penalty for not rolling away and Robinson was on target from distance for a 12-0 lead.

Gloucester were then forced into a further reshuffle as skipper Gareth Delve couldn't continue after lengthy treatment and Adam Eustace entered the fray. Charlie Sharples also had to recover after a massive hit as he released the ball.

Leeds were still well and truly in the game and openside flanker Hendre Fourie, capped by England Saxons this year, was leading the charge. One break from his own 22 got the nerves jangling but poor handling spoiled the effort.

Freddie Burns then lit up Kingsholm with a sparkling break from his own 22 but his kick ahead for Simpson-Daniel ran just too far and Henry Fa'afili got back in time.

With the game approaching the final quarter, Rabeni was proving to be a handful for the Gloucester defence and his half break on the hour gave Ceiron Thomas his first chance of points but the fly half badly hooked his penalty attempt wide.

Gloucester had been deprived of possession but a catch and drive sucked in the Leeds forwards to create some space out wide and Lesley Vainikolo was so nearly in the corner from Simpson-Daniel's pass. Yet, Leeds, to their credit, held out again.

Moments later, it took a moment of genius from Nicky Robinson to settle the game. The fly half took the ball on the Leeds 10m line and spotted space behind the Leeds defensive line. The kick through was beautifully measured and he re-gathered to score. His own conversion made the score 19-0 after 70 minutes.

That was it for the scoring although Gloucester did finish strongly and more scores looked likely with Andy Williams coming closest when he was tackled into touch at the corner.

One game down out of the three in eight days. Gloucester would happily settle for two more.

JC