

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**WEDNESDAY, 31 MARCH, 2010**

**KINGSTON PARK – GUINNESS PREMIERSHIP**

**GLOUCESTER PAY THE PENALTY FOR INDISCIPLINE  
AT NEWCASTLE**

**NEWCASTLE FALCONS 25 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 13**

**Match Report by Duncan Wood**

The locals sing about Blaydon but Gloucester were never at the races on Wednesday evening as Kiwi fly half Jimmy Gopperth's 20 point haul helped Newcastle to a 25-13 win.

It was a bitter setback for Gloucester's top six ambitions on a bitterly cold night at Kingston Park.

Gloucester were simply below par in a number of areas. Newcastle belied the fact that they'd had 24 hours less to recover and looked sharp and hungry.

Bryan Redpath's men squandered a couple of glorious changes in the first half and then paid the price for conceding a multitude of penalties which gave Gopperth the chance to swing the game the Falcons' way.

The home side were definitely good value for the win as they took full advantage of the chances that came their way and the only shame for Newcastle was that so few people were there to see it.

The home forwards were up for the fight, Gopperth and Young looked lively at half back and Tu'ipolotu was the class three quarter on display.

Gloucester will have to lick their wounds and bounce back as Saturday sees another tough game with Saracens the visitors to Kingsholm. They will be battered and bruised as they fly back to Gloucester tonight,

the damage inflicted to their pride just as painful as the physical equivalent.

The snow that had been predicted to hit the North East had fortunately failed to materialise although Kingston Park was bitterly cold with a strong wind swirling. The pitch had been covered until mid-afternoon but it still looked heavy underfoot.

Gloucester needed the win to continue the quest for an automatic qualification place for the Heineken Cup by finishing in the top 6 of the Guinness Premiership whereas Newcastle were smarting after a humiliating defeat on Sunday at Saracens.

The first half chance came Gloucester's way after a ball spilled in midfield gave James Simpson-Daniel the chance to hack on into the home 22 but the ball didn't bounce Gloucester's way and the chance was gone.

Newcastle's early tactic appeared to be to use the big forwards to punch holes around the fringes and they benefitted from a few decisions from their way in the early stages.

Not releasing the tackled player on the Gloucester 22 was the decision that gave Jimmy Gopperth the chance to open the scoring and the fly half made no mistake for 3-0 after eight minutes.

Gloucester duly carved out a great opportunity immediately afterwards due to some offloading from Fuimaono-Sapolu and Vainikolo and a half break from Nicky Robinson but Burns' hurried offload couldn't find Sharples outside him.

It was all very loose from Gloucester and they paid the price on 14 minutes. Newcastle won turnover ball on halfway and Tu'ipulotu broke Burns' tackle before making good ground and finding the unmarked Biggs who scored the game's first try. Gopperth added the conversion for 10-0.

Gloucester's pack hit back with a great catch and drive which earned a penalty as Josh Afu came around offside and Nicky Robinson got Gloucester on the board with a well struck penalty from out wide.

It inspired a dangerous spell from Gloucester with Robinson almost jinking his way through again and Falcons scrum half Micky Young saved the day as he gathered a canny grubber kick from Fuimaono-Sapolu.

Newcastle held out with some tigerish tackling but then gifted Gloucester a shot at goal for getting in front of the kicker and Robinson made it 10-6 after 29 minutes.

The cause wasn't helped with half time approaching as Freddie Burns, who had been visibly limping, was replaced by Tim Taylor and a charged down kick created pressure but Gopperth's drop goal faded wide.

However, Newcastle finished strongly and stretched the Gloucester defence with some neat offloading out of contact. A penalty was eventually conceded for going to ground and Gopperth made the half time score 13-6.

Gloucester had enjoyed some promising moments in the first half but they were too few and far between for liking.

The home pack was evidently fired up, Gopperth was running the game well and Tu'ipulotu looked dangerous whenever he had the ball. The first half was Newcastle's; could Gloucester respond?

The instant answer was no. A knock on was followed by a lost lineout followed by a penalty for handling the ball on the floor and Gopperth needed no second invitation to make the score 16-6.

A reaction was needed but Newcastle continued to look hungry and sharp and the Gloucester side were mostly reduced to tackling duties.

Newcastle scented blood, took a Gloucester scrum against the head and Josh Afu powered towards the line. Only desperate defence kept the Falcons out but at the expense of a penalty and Gopperth stretched the lead to 19-6.

Apo Satala then came offside at a Falcons scrum to concede yet another penalty but Gopperth, for once, was narrowly off target.

Gloucester needed a break and got one as Alex Tait spilled an up and under. Capdevielle gathered, Rory Lawson moved it wide and Tim Taylor steamed onto James Simpson-Daniel's well-timed pass to sprint home for the try. Robinson converted to narrow the gap to 19-13.

Gloucester were threatening a comeback but yet another penalty, this time for blocking kick chasers, proved costly as Gopperth kicked his fifth penalty to move Gloucester out of losing bonus point range at 22-13.

Newcastle were in the ascendant again and applied further pressure. Gloucester again failed to release the tackled player and Gopperth made the score 25-13.

Gloucester, who by now had used several replacements because of injury, went in search of the bonus point but the home defence was in no mood to give anything away. The occasional half break was made but the door was swiftly slammed shut.

The Kingston Park crowd celebrated loudly as they acknowledged their side's efforts on the night.

Gloucester, on the contrary, trudged from the field knowing that they were second best on the night and with a lot to think about on the way home.