

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SUNDAY, APRIL 11, 2010

ADAMS PARK – AMLIN CHALLENGE CUP

PLENTY OF FIGHT AT ADAMS PARK BUT WASPS WIN IN STYLE

LONDON WASPS 42 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 26

Match Report by Duncan Wood

Gloucester's European ambitions were brought to a shuddering halt at Adams Park on Sunday afternoon as Wasps gleefully exploited a below par defensive performance with Tom Varndell running in a hat trick in a 42-26 win.

So, Wasps will progress to the European Challenge Cup semi-finals and Gloucester have the Guinness Premiership to focus.

It could have been different. Gloucester were competitive and created a host of scoring opportunities of their own. However, they failed to take full advantage of the openings they carved out.

On the other hand, Wasps looked dangerous with ball in hand from the off and only went off the boil when Gloucester enjoyed a good spell of possession in the second half.

When Wasps did cling onto possession, with the mercurial Danny Cipriani enjoying a day to remember, they looked capable of scoring at will. The late scores may have padded the scoreline but Wasps were good value for it.

Defeat will hurt Gloucester and they will wonder what might have been. However, as Bryan Redpath reflected after the game, you have to defend well to win matches and it was too easy for Wasps to score today.

Gloucester's preparations were disrupted on the Sunday morning as Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu, in such fine form this season, woke up with a back spasm and was replaced in the starting line up by Jonny May with Mike Tindall moving into the inside centre berth.

Wasps for their part were deprived of the services of David Lemi who suffered a calf injury during the warm up.

It was Gloucester's third visit to Adams Park this season with the first two meetings having ended in narrow victories for the home side. Would it be third time lucky for Gloucester?

On a clear and bright day at Adams Park, Gloucester started brightly and were evidently intent on keeping ball in hand. The Wasps defence was robust but eventually conceded a penalty and Nicky Robinson kicked Gloucester into a fifth minute 3-0 lead.

Immediately, Wasps hit back. Keeping the ball in hand from deep they moved ominously into Gloucester territory until a floated pass from Kefu put Ben Jacobs into a gap and the full back scored untouched. Cipriani added the conversion for 7-3.

Robinson duly got Gloucester back to within a point as Wasps failed to roll away from the tackle area to make it 7-6 but the Cherry and Whites were lucky to escape when George Skivington knocked on in the 22 after a break from Joe Worsley opened up the defence.

It had been a testing few minutes for Gloucester with Simpson and Cipriani looking lively at half back for Wasps but a fine catch and drive from the pack got the side moving forward again and only a forward pass denied Freddie Burns a run to the line.

However, it was Cipriani who was next to score as he slotted a penalty from near halfway after Gloucester offended at a ruck.

Cipriani was the architect moments later for the second Wasps try. He ghosted past Olivier Azam and then stepped Burns before a neat offload put Serge Betsen in for a stroll to the line. Cipriani converted himself for 17-6.

Gloucester desperately needed the next score and got it almost immediately. Jonny May made a powerful midfield break and almost made the line but the supporting Adam Eustace was there to pick up and drive over. Robinson converted for 17-13 after 25 minutes.

Wasps were still looking dangerous with ball in hand and swift hands right on 33 minutes had Gloucester stretched again with Tom Varndell, popping up on the opposite wing, holding off Jonny May and just making the line after much deliberation from the TMO. Cipriani converted from the touchline to open up a 24-13 lead.

An instant response was again required and again May was involved. His half break led to a penalty as Wasps killed the ball and Robinson kicked the penalty.

But the good work was promptly undone as Gloucester committed an offence at the ruck a few metres inside their own half and Cipriani was on target for 27-16.

So, Wasps took an 11 point lead into the half time break and, based on the quality of their back play, were worthy of the lead.

Danny Cipriani was having one of those days when little seemed to be going wrong for him and the home side would be looking for more of the same.

Gloucester did seem to be enjoying superiority up front. Would that be the way that they would work their way back into the game?

Ironically, Wasps immediately forced a penalty at a set scrum and Cipriani's excellent afternoon continued as his penalty made the score 30-16.

Nicky Robinson did his best to get his side back in the game shortly afterwards with a searing break after Wasps overthrew their own lineout but the defence got back and the chance was gone.

Gloucester enjoyed a good spell of pressure but Wasps are never an easy side to chase the game against and determined defence meant that a 56th minute Robinson penalty was the only reward although Jonny May was denied a probable try only by a cruel bounce of the ball.

Wasps continued to look dangerous but there was still plenty of fight in Gloucester and Dave Attwood's break with 15 minutes to go looked to have put Freddie Burns in for a try but the offload was well forward.

Making a half break but not finishing it off became the theme of the second half for Gloucester as they repeatedly made the initial breakthrough but the crucial pass refused to go to hand.

And Wasps showed them how to do it as the game went into the final ten minutes. Ward-Smith came off the base of a scrum and Simpson's pass to Cipriani was swiftly and skilfully transferred down the line.

The centres then carried it on before Jacobs found Varndell on a supporting inside line for the score. Cipriani was off target but Wasps were out of sight at 35-19.

Attwood almost made the line but Gloucester finally got their consolation score as Simpson-Daniel put Sharples in at the corner. Robinson converted from the touchline for 35-26.

Wasps didn't even let Gloucester have the final word as they pounced upon a turnover in midfield and quick hands again sent Varndell hurtling over the line.

It was a painful end to a difficult afternoon.

JC