

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, 11 SEPTEMBER, 2010

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**ROBINSON HOLDS HIS NERVE TO CLINCH POINTS
FOR GLOUCESTER**

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 22 LEEDS CARNEGIE 21

Match Report by Duncan Wood

Nicky Robinson showed nerves of steel with less than two minutes remaining to slot a match winning penalty after Leeds Carnegie had threatened to head back north with the points on Saturday.

Having led for the majority of the game, it looked as though it was all going to turn sour for Gloucester.

Leeds scored a fluke try to take a late lead when a kick rebounded off an upright and Gloucester then turned down a sure fire three points in search of a try when the penalty would have earned the lead.

With the tension mounting and Leeds running down the clock, David Rose penalised the visitors and Robinson stepped up to stroke home a crucial three points and earn the win.

Relief surged around Kingsholm as referee Rose signalled full time shortly afterwards as Gloucester secured their first win of the Aviva Premiership season.

Such drama seemed unlikely earlier in the afternoon when Gloucester scored two tries in the first ten minutes and a third on the stroke of half time.

At that point, creating chances seemingly at will, it seemed a matter of when and not if the try scoring bonus point would be secured.

However, Leeds are a well drilled and disciplined outfit who are more than capable of playing some decent rugby themselves and they simply refused to be shaken off. They chipped away at the Gloucester lead in the second half and then looked set to sneak a shock win. But Robinson's nerve held and sent the Kingsholm regulars home in a good mood.

Gloucester were given an ideal start as Leeds gathered the kick off but went straight to ground, conceding a penalty but Nicky Robinson was off target with his attempt.

However, Gloucester shrugged it off and took the game to Leeds immediately. The build up was patient before moving the ball wide and Lesley Vainikolo made the incisive break before offloading to the supporting Luke Narraway who made the line with Robinson slotting a fine conversion for 7-0.

The score settled a few nerves but Leeds were next on the scoreboard when Christian Lewis-Pratt landed a well struck penalty for 7-3.

It barely disrupted the home side's momentum as a Leeds turnover gave Gloucester great field position. Alasdair Dickinson popped up in the fly half slot and took a great angle to break a tackle and then go around the last man to score a well taken try. Robinson added the extras for 14-3 after 9 minutes.

Lewis-Pratt promptly narrowed the gap with another penalty when a Gloucester player failed to release the tackled player to keep his side in the game despite Gloucester forcing the pace and looking dangerous.

It was physical stuff and the first quarter came to a close with Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu receiving lengthy treatment and Leeds prop Mike MacDonald forced to leave the pitch due to a blood injury.

Despite being mostly on the back foot, Leeds were still a threat even from deep and one hack downfield had to be superbly gathered by a sprinting Charlie Sharples who then turned on the afterburners to get Gloucester back on the offensive.

If the home side were guilty of anything at this point it was of being over ambitious and not looking after possession, and duly paid the price on the half hour.

Trying to attack from deep resulted in a Leeds intercept and the visitors kept the ball alive well to give Lewis-Pratt some space on the blind side and the fly half shrugged off a couple of tackles to score and narrow the gap to 14-11.

It was a wake-up call and Gloucester immediately tried to strike back with Sharples and Simpson-Daniel linking up in the Leeds 22 only for a forward pass to end the threat.

But the half ended well as the pack drove a lineout well before releasing the backs. Simpson-Daniel came in off his wing and Sharples almost made the line.

However, Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu took the ball at first receiver and showed a good step and considerable strength to score the try that took Gloucester into half time with a 19-11 lead.

It had been a breathless 40 minutes and both sides looked capable of scoring a lot of points. Gloucester had struck when they remained patient and worked the phases without trying to go too wide too early.

More of the same would be required in the second period but you could guarantee that Leeds would fight tooth and nail to make it difficult.

Gloucester came out firing all cylinders and quickly took the game to Leeds with a fine chance going begging in the opening moments after great work from backs and forwards alike. However, Charlie Sharples couldn't hold onto the ball with the line beckoning.

A series of Gloucester infringements then allowed Leeds to move downfield and Lewis-Pratt was gifted an easy penalty for offside in midfield for 19-14 after 51 minutes as the visitors refused to be shaken off.

Leeds enjoyed a good spell and employed a good offloading game to keep moving forward but the Gloucester defence held out and a sweeping backs move almost resulted in a fourth try but Leeds scrambled back well and then thwarted two 5m lineouts from Gloucester.

The game was still well and truly in the balance with the game going into the final quarter and Lewis-Pratt missed a more than kickable penalty on 65 minutes.

However, when his 68th minute penalty hit the post, Gloucester were slow to react and Leeds centre Luther Burrell pounced to score and stun Kingsholm. Lewis-Pratt's conversion gave Leeds their first lead at 19-21.

Gloucester came straight back and earned a penalty in the shadow of the Leeds posts. Narraway took a quick tap sensing Leeds were on the ropes but Robinson's long pass went straight into touch to end the danger.

Leeds went into safety first mode, trying to run down the clock with more than 3 minutes left to play but conceded a penalty on the floor and Robinson held his nerve to nudge Gloucester back in front with just over a minute to play, a lead they wouldn't relinquish.

JC