

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SUNDAY, 19 SEPTEMBER, 2010

MADEJSKI STADIUM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

LAMB'S BOOT AGAIN HAUNTS GLOUCESTER IN IRISH DEFEAT

LONDON IRISH 23 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 16

Match Report by Duncan Wood

The Madejski Stadium hasn't been the happiest of hunting grounds for Gloucester in recent seasons and so it proved again on Sunday afternoon as London Irish emerged 23-16 winners.

Once again the boot of the former Gloucester fly half proved to be crucial as he chalked up a 13 point haul as Bryan Redpath's side fell foul of referee Dean Richards on countless occasions.

Gloucester conceded something like 19 penalties throughout the course of the game. Many of the them were obvious but, on several occasions, they didn't seem to get the rub of the green.

Whatever the transgression, the penalty count prevented Gloucester getting any real momentum to their game and London Irish are too good a side to turn down the possession gifted to them.

There was a stage in the second half where it really did seem as though Gloucester would get something out of the match. At 10-9, they had Irish wobbling slightly and the Madejski Stadium crowd had gone slightly quiet.

However, from a promising position in the Irish 22, three straight penalties moved Irish downfield and into scoring position and the chance was gone.

A brave late fight-back did result in an injury time score for Lesley Vainikolo and Tim Taylor's cool conversion clinched a losing bonus point but it was too little too late.

The inevitable tactical kicking duel got matters underway as both sides looked to settle and it led to Irish opening the scoring through a 6th minute Ryan Lamb penalty when Gloucester were caught offside in midfield.

It was a fairly frantic opening 10 minutes and the home side enjoyed much of the possession with Gloucester unable to make any real inroads.

Gloucester's first attacking platform came from a lineout on the Irish 22 and, when Scott Lawson spun off the maul to feed Rory Lawson, the scrum half was taken high and Nicky Robinson duly levelled the scores after 15 minutes.

The Irish response was swift as they stretched Gloucester left and right. The defence was initially robust but an opening was eventually fashioned on the left flank despite a hint of a forward pass and a neat inside pass gave hooker James Buckland an unimpeded run to the line for the game's first try which Lamb converted for 10-3.

It was tough going for Gloucester at this point not least because they were on the wrong end of a number of refereeing decisions which was preventing them building any momentum.

Gloucester replied with a powerful scrummage after Lamb kicked dead which earned a penalty and Robinson landed a monster kick from inside his own half to make it 10-6.

However, the pressure was quickly back on Gloucester when Lesley Vainikolo kept a long kick to touch infield near his own line but Charlie Sharples couldn't gather to concede a 5m scrum.

With half time approaching, it was a big moment and Gloucester conceded two penalties at the scrum before Irish opted to kick for the corner.

Gloucester's pack worked wonders and turned the ball over for Robinson to counter and kick downfield. Lamb got Back but an ambitious pass put his defence under real pressure and Gloucester won a 5m scrum as Jonathon Joseph showed courage and awareness to just thwart Mike Tindall's grubber intended for Charlie Sharples. However, referee Dean Richards awarded a free kick against Gloucester to end an enthralling half.

Gloucester would have been devastated not to get anything from the final attack but it had been a massive defensive effort moments earlier to escape unscathed near their own line.

With both teams emerging unchanged for the second half, Gloucester needed a good start and the pack gave Robinson a chance as they won a penalty at a set scrum and the Welsh fly half needed no second invitation to make the score 10-9.

It had been a good spell from Gloucester but they found themselves on the back foot again after a penalty at scrum time conceded field position.

Keeping the ball tight around the fringes, the Irish pack drove dangerously onwards and only a TMO decision denied the home side a try as they piled over but play came back for a penalty which Lamb stroked home for 13-9 after 52 minutes.

As the volume rose the Madejski, Gloucester's discipline started to slip and three successive penalties at the ruck area gifted Lamb another simple penalty opportunity and he gratefully accepted for 16-9.

The game was still in the balance as it went into its final quarter but Gloucester's indiscipline at the breakdown was hurting them and they were getting precious little else from the officials elsewhere around the park.

And, ultimately, Gloucester's defence cracked. Mapusua spotted a gap at the ruck and burst through with James Simpson-Daniel just getting back.

However, quickly recycled ball gave centre Daniel Bowden some space and his long miss pass found George Stowers who had just enough space to touch down in the corner despite Nicky Robinson's gallant attempt to get across. Lamb's conversion bounced in via post and cross bar to typify Gloucester's luck.

Sensing blood and a possible try scoring bonus point, the home side started to turn down kickable penalties but Gloucester dug deep in defence to hold out.

And Gloucester had the final word as they remained patient even with no time left on the countdown clock.

Tim Molenaar made a key break and the ball was eventually worked left for Lesley Vainikolo to cross for his side's first try.

Tim Taylor held his nerve to convert and send Gloucester home with something to show for their efforts.

JC