

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, 25 SEPTEMBER, 2010

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

ROBINSON HOLD NERVE TO EARN CRUCIAL WIN

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 22 LONDON WASPS 20

Match Report by Duncan Wood

On an afternoon when the lead changed hands several hands, Nicky Robinson kept his cool to slot two penalties from inside his own half and earn Gloucester a 22-20 win over London Wasps.

It was an important win but one that was hard on the nerves as Gloucester had to endure the agony of a last minute penalty attempt from Wasps' Dave Walder which dipped just under the crossbar.

Had that kick gone over, it would have been harsh on Gloucester who delivered a performance of passion and commitment that belied the criticism levelled at the team in recent days.

Wasps scored two fine tries which could have knocked the stuffing out of Gloucester but the home side bounced back impressively from these setbacks.

Robinson may well grab the headlines but he'll be the first to praise his team mates, not least fellow fly half Tim Taylor who delivered a fine first half performance before having to leave the fray at the break.

However, it was all about the team effort today and also the backing of a superbly spiky Kingsholm crowd who backed all their side's efforts with gusto.

After heavy rain in Gloucester the afternoon before, matchday dawned dry and sunny at Kingsholm with Gloucester looking to bounce back from the disappointment of the previous weekend at London Irish.

Head Coach Bryan Redpath had made half a dozen changes to his starting line up in a bid to get Gloucester's season back on track against a side who have proved troublesome opponents in the past.

And it was Wasps who had the first chance of points as referee Andrew Small penalised Gloucester at the ruck much to the disgust of the Shed. Walder's penalty was horribly struck but scraped its way over.

However, Gloucester were immediately back on level terms as Charlie Sharples leapt high to claim the restart. Jim Hamilton was in support and Wasps were caught offside which gave Tim Taylor an easy kick to level matters.

Gloucester then embarked upon a phase of thrilling attacking rugby after a quick tap free kick from Rory Lawson with the Wasps defence at full stretch but the visitors just held out.

Lawson was also putting in his usual lion-hearted effort in defence and one turnover after a half break from Riki Flutey was timely in the extreme. The visitors' offloading game was causing problems but Gloucester were defending with pride.

It was getting lively up front as well and Brett Deacon and Tim Payne spun out of a rolling maul trading punches earning both a lengthy rebuke and the inevitable yellow card duly followed.

Gloucester then got a welcome break as Joe Simpson's long kick rolled dead. A penalty was forced at the ensuing scrum and Taylor's kick nudged his side in front after 28 minutes.

The crowd was then in uproar as Gloucester were denied a score when Charlie Sharples was adjudged to have pushed David Lemi as both chased a kick through into the Wasps 22.

Insult was then added to injury as Dan Ward-Smith wriggled out of a tackle with seemingly nothing on and showed great pace to score under the Gloucester posts. Walder converted for 6-10.

Backed by a now enraged crowd, the Gloucester response was ferocious and a prolonged attack gave Taylor another penalty chance and the fly half nailed it for 9-10.

The first try quickly followed. Gloucester won a Wasps lineout on halfway and launched the backs. Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu may have only scored his first try for the club against Leeds a fortnight ago but this one was a beauty.

Sleight of hand followed by a monster hand off and the centre was through the first line of defence before showing enough pace to keep the cover at bay and score. Taylor's conversion made it 16-10.

There was even a chance for Taylor to add to the score with no time left on the clock but his ambitious penalty from five metres inside his own half didn't have enough on it and a frantic half of rugby came to a close.

It was unfortunately Taylor's last contribution of a fine performance as he was replaced by Nicky Robinson at half time with the scene now set for the Welsh international fly half to carry on the good work.

And the breathless nature of the play continued as Gloucester went after a vital go ahead score but couldn't quite prise open the Wasps defence whilst the visitors still remained dangerous while only six points adrift.

It was tight with little to choose between the sides. Walder was off target with a 50th minute penalty from distance and Robinson hit the post with an effort from halfway on 55 minutes as the tension grew.

It took some magic to break the deadlock. Firstly Richard Haughton returned a long kick with interest before Joe Simpson showed awareness and pace to slip a tackle, break clear and fight his way to the line to score. Walder converted to move Wasps in front 16-17.

Gloucester promptly hit back as the game continued to ebb and flow as Robinson slotted an incredible penalty from several metres inside his own half to make it 19-17 with 15 minutes to go but a break from Flutey led to Walder making it 19-20 with 8 left on the clock.

The drama amazingly still wasn't over as Robinson matched his earlier effort with another long range effort yet there was still more to come.

Andy Hazell, who had put in a monumental effort throughout the afternoon, was harshly penalised at the breakdown to give Dave Walder one last chance of glory.

However, his kick from distance dipped just underneath the crossbar to ensure a memorable and deserved win for Gloucester.

JC