

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2010

RECREATION GROUND – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

GLOUCESTER DEFY CRITICS TO EARN EPIC WIN AT THE REC

BATH RUGBY 3 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 18

Gloucester wins at the Rec against Bath are rarer than hens teeth in the professional era but Bryan Redpath's side delivered a performance of such pride and passion on Friday evening that just such a win was well deserved.

Gloucester have received more than their fair share of media criticism in recent weeks after an indifferent start to the season so an away trip to Bath seemed an unlikely place to shove negative words down their speaker's throat.

However, Gloucester took the game to Bath in the first half and quickly chalked up 18 points with the home side only managing a solitary Olly Barkley penalty in reply.

Then, after the break, the defensive effort wasn't quite on a par with Rorke's Drift but, time and again, a Cherry and White defender put his body on the line to bring down a Bath defender or force a turnover.

Bath rarely threatened and, when they did, the Gloucester defence drew an imaginary line on the ground and allowed no-one to pass.

Mike Tindall was deservedly named Man of the Match by Sky but each and every man can feel proud of the role he played.

The win, which shows just what this side can do when they perform to their potential, takes Gloucester up to 4th place in the Aviva Premiership Rugby table and they enter the European campaign in good spirits.

After the monsoon like conditions experienced during the day, the Rec pitch looked firm enough underfoot but the way that the grass glistened under the floodlights indicated that it was pretty greasy underfoot.

Understandably as a consequence, the ball spent plenty of time in the air in the opening few minutes as both teams looked to force an error from kicks downfield.

Gloucester's pack earned the first opportunity of points when Bath interfered at the lineout but, unlike last week, Nicky Robinson couldn't find the target from inside his own half with the ball perhaps not carrying as well at night and in the damp atmosphere.

It was a rare old tussle up front as both packs tried to assert their superiority over their counterparts and referee Wayne Barnes.

Not surprisingly an error brought about the first score as Matt Carraro fumbled in his own 22. Doran-Jones pounced on the loose ball and Robinson offloaded superbly to give Lesley Vainikolo just enough room to score in the corner. Robinson completed the job with a superb touchline conversion.

It was an impressive opening from Gloucester and quickly recycled ball with the pack carrying powerfully kept Bath on the back foot just minutes later to earn another penalty opportunity, but Robinson's kick glanced the post and stayed out.

A good spell from Bath followed with skipper Luke Watson prominent and Gloucester's defence had to be on its toes.

Both teams were playing with real ambition in the conditions but a spell of tight play led to another Gloucester penalty as Pieter Dixon failed to roll away from the tackle area and Robinson made it 10-0 after 21 minutes.

Gloucester needed to consolidate but were caught napping by the restart which found space and gave Bath great field position. In at the side of the ruck gave Barkley a shot at goal and he duly bisected the posts.

Gloucester hit back with a great try. Tindall's half break gave Robinson the chance to roll a grubber behind the Bath defence. Fuimaono-Sapolu gathered, offloaded to Vainikolo and the winger found the supporting Robinson who dived over in glee. His conversion drifted wide but the lead was extended to 15-3.

Barkley had an immediate chance to respond but his penalty from distance finished short and wide to the delight of the travelling support.

There was plenty of effort from the home side but also a touch of anxiety and Gloucester were looking the more composed side and doing the simple things well.

It had been a magnificent effort from the pack in particular and they forced another penalty out of the Bath eight on their own put in as half time approached, but Robinson was off target only to promptly make amends moments later when Bath fielded the ball in an offside position.

An 18-3 lead at half time was perhaps more than Gloucester could have hoped for before the game but no-one could deny that Bryan Redpath's men were good value for it.

It had been a superbly committed yet disciplined performance to this point but a home fight back was bound to come. Would Gloucester be prepared for it?

Both teams emerged for the second half having made changes. Bath had replaced their skipper Luke Watson while Gloucester introduced Freddie Burns for Nicky Robinson. Both changes presumably for injuries.

But the first significant incident saw Gloucester reduced to 14 men as Jim Hamilton seemed to kick out at a Bath player whilst on the floor and referee Barnes didn't hesitate to brandish the yellow card.

Gloucester were forced onto the back foot as Bath went for the corner but heroic defence kept the home side at bay for the time being.

Gloucester even had a chance to extend the lead when Charlie Sharples forced an error from Nick Abendanon near his own line but the throw from the 5m lineout was off target and Bath held out.

With the volume mounting at the Rec as the home side exhorted their team to get back into the game, Gloucester survived the sin bin period and Dave Attwood replaced Hamilton. The natives were growing restless.

Gloucester's pack were working wonders to secure turnovers at the breakdown and Freddie Burns was starting to pull the strings with real impudence. However, the fear of a comeback still remained.

As the game went into the final quarter, Bath opted to kick for the corner instead of going for goal and the Gloucester defence found itself under real scrutiny near its own line, but again the pack performed miracles to emerge unscathed from the pressure.

As time ebbed away, Bath grew ever more desperate and more and more passes hit the deck either through individual error or because of the ferocity of the Gloucester tackling.

Eventually, the home side seemed to simply run out of ideas and, as Gloucester hoofed the ball gleefully into touch, the celebrations began.