

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, JANUARY 8, 2011

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

GLOUCESTER BOUNCE BACK TO SCALP THE CHIEFS

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 37 EXETER CHIEFS 23

Match Report by Duncan Wood/Tim Lamden

Gloucester put aside the disappointment of last weekend's defeat at Leeds Carnegie to showcase their exciting attacking capabilities with a five-try stellar performance in a 38-25 victory against Exeter at Kingsholm.

After back-to-back defeats previously at Leeds and then at home two weeks before to La Rochelle, the home side had a point to prove today.

Maybe it had been a week of licking their wounds, maybe it was several days of quiet contemplation. Whatever the approach, the result was impressive.

It wasn't easy. The Chiefs, to their credit, simply don't know when to give up. Other teams in a similar position would have capitulated in the second half. Exeter ran in three tries in a massive show of pride and defiance.

For the home side, James Simpson-Daniel was outstanding with a hand in two tries and an excellent try of his own while flanker Andy Hazell continued his fine form with some key turnovers.

The win moves Gloucester back into sixth place in the Aviva Premiership table breathing down the necks of Wasps, Harlequins and Saracens with games in hand and still well in contention for a Heineken Cup qualification berth.

Exeter started well. On five minutes, after an opening period of sustained Exeter pressure Gloucester conceded a penalty dead in front that fly-half Gareth Steenson slotted with ease from just outside the 22.

Gloucester quickly hit back though on eight minutes with a Burns penalty kicked from slightly left of the posts outside of the 22 after Exeter failed to roll away at the breakdown.

Then the game burst into life. Gloucester were under pressure but a magnificent turnover from open-side Andy Hazell turned the momentum.

The ball was switched to his blindside partner Peter Buxton who put James Simpson-Daniel into space. Charging down the touchline, the winger drew Exeter's last man delivering a deft inside pass that left scrum-half Rory Lawson with a 40m dash to the line for a superb opening try on 18 minutes.

The home side's opening score injected some real energy and pace into the game and Exeter quickly responded with renewed vigour. The visitors looked dangerous, putting the ball through a number of phases just feet from the Gloucester line, but excellent work in defence gave Gloucester a turnover as Exeter were penalised for holding on.

From the penalty, as if from nothing once more, the home side took a quick tap just yards from their own line releasing Mike Tindall.

The centre fed Simpson-Daniel who sped down the line, drawing the final defender to put Olly Morgan in for another scintillating Gloucester try on 27 minutes. This time Burns succeeded with a tricky conversion from the left to extend Gloucester's lead at 15-3.

Exeter regrouped under their own posts, seemingly shell shocked having conceded two long range scores when they had been on the attack themselves.

Exeter's enthusiasm wasn't dented and the away side responded swiftly with an incisive individual break from fly-half Steenson, taking Exeter back into the Gloucester 22. Gloucester hands in the ruck led to a penalty opportunity and Steenson made it 15-6 on the half hour.

For much of the final five minutes of the half Gloucester were in the ascendancy, moving the ball menacingly from phase to phase. A basketball-style pass from Fuimaono-Sapolu to release Morgan for Gloucester's third try was ruled forward and the home side were awarded a penalty for an earlier offside.

From the penalty, Gloucester continued their onslaught in the Exeter 22 and it took a desperate illegal interference from scrum-half Haydn Thomas inches from his own line to prevent a seemingly inevitable Gloucester score. Thomas was sent to the sin bin and Burns converted the penalty under the posts to give Gloucester an 18-6 lead going into the interval.

Gloucester emerged from the break looking much the same side that ended the first half. The home side were moving the ball well and looked threatening in possession.

Burns was navigating play well at fly-half, commanding phase upon phase closer towards the Exeter line. Strong drives took the advancing home side agonisingly close to a third score through Burns but a supporting Andy Hazell was held up on the line.

At the resulting scrum, Lawson spun the ball blind to Simpson-Daniel who continued his delightful performance with some trademark crafty footwork that freed him at last for a third Gloucester try on 54 minutes.

Exeter were reeling but they certainly weren't out for the count and hit back in bizarre style. A drop out on the hour was mis-fielded by Charlie Sharples and hacked on by Exeter flanker Tom Johnson who chased his kick, hacking on again to score with a dramatic dive in the corner. Steenson was unable to add the conversion leaving Exeter 14 points behind at 25-11.

But, three minutes later, Gloucester grabbed the all-important bonus point try after deft hands from number 8 Luke Narryway put winger Charlie Sharples into space and the winger showed his speed, outpacing the covering Exeter defence to go over for an impressive fourth Gloucester try. Burns could not complete the conversion but Gloucester led 30-11.

Exeter still weren't done and profited from a possible lapse in Gloucester concentration as a pass hit the deck in the home 22 and Sireli Nagelevuki smashed his way over for his side's second try which Steenson converted to cut the deficit at 30-18.

The heavy conditions underfoot took their toll and Gloucester had to reshuffle as cramp and tight hamstrings started to nag. However, Akapusi Qera pounced on a Chiefs error near their own line to score a fifth.

The game was in the bag but the Chiefs had the last word as Nagelevuki crossed for a second with no time left on the clock but it was Gloucester's day with the final score 37-23.

JC