

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, JANUARY 15, 2011

STADIO MARIO BATTAGLINI – AMLIN CHALLENGE CUP

GLOUCESTER HAVE TO WORK HARD TO COMPLETE ITALIAN WIN

FEMI-CZ RUGBY ROVIGO 7 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 55

Match Report by Duncan Wood

Maybe too much was expected from this fixture following the first meeting between these two sides but Gloucester completed a comfortable enough win over Rovigo on Saturday without ever really having to hit top gear.

To be fair, Gloucester never really had to play to their full potential. They went about their business against Rovigo in a professional manner and a win was never in doubt on a day when the lack of a home crowd, despite the presence of a few hundred typically vocal Gloucester supporters, meant that there wasn't much atmosphere to feed off.

Rovigo were spirited but limited. They defended with courage and managed to get a decent amount of possession for a big chunk of the second half but it was always going to be a question of how many.

Gloucester, of course, came into the game knowing that La Rochelle's win in Agen left their hopes of qualification hanging by a thread.

However, there was a job to be done in Northern Italy and nothing less than a comprehensive win was expected against a side who conceded 90 points at Kingsholm.

The outcome was, in fact, in the bag by half time with four tries scored and a comfortable 27-0 scoreline reflecting the balance of play.

However, the second half proved to be something of a non-event until three late scores, two from replacement Tim Taylor, boosted the tally and eased Gloucester to a comfortable win.

Gloucester, perhaps predictably, started strongly and took the game to their hosts. However, spirited defence kept Bryan Redpath's side at bay and a Freddie Burns penalty on 5 minutes was the opening score.

And there was a whiff of good fortune about Gloucester's opening try on 10 minutes. A neat backs move gave Henry Trinder some room to run and his grubber ahead was well weighted near the Rovigo line.

However, the Rovigo full back Calanchini mis-played the rolling ball as he willed it to run into the in-goal area but slipped and Trinder simply fell on the ball to score. Burns converted in style.

Trinder soon crossed for his second after a powerful driving maul sapped the strength of the home defence, the centre latching onto a neat inside pass from Burns and stepping his way past the final man and under the posts. Burns again converted.

It was one way stuff as the opening quarter drew to a close with Rovigo clutching at straws in terms of possession and only brave tackling keeping them in the game.

However, after wave upon wave of Gloucester attacks, the pack decided to keep it tight and number eight Matt Cox burrowed his way over in the corner for a 22-0 lead.

The bonus point try wasn't long in coming with the pack again doing the hard work before Charlie Sharples came in off his wing at pace to just make the line.

A couple of soft penalties then allowed Rovigo to venture into the Gloucester 22 for the first time and a good old-fashioned scuffle broke out near the Gloucester line with Paul Doran-Jones getting a good talking to.

Good lineout ball gave the home side the opportunity to rumble their way towards the line but the Gloucester defence was solid and the ball held up to kill the move.

That brought the action to a close for the first half with Gloucester well on top and clearly way too strong for their plucky opponents who were battling gamely but clearly punching above their weight.

More tries seemed destined to follow after the break when surely superior fitness would tell and complacency seemingly Gloucester's biggest enemy.

The fifth try soon came. A cunning grubber from Sharples was superbly scooped up by Olly Morgan and the full back offloaded out of the tackle for Sharples to complete the score. Burns converted for 34-0.

Gloucester had already introduced Rupert Harden at half time and Bryan Redpath now determined that this would be a good time to give Tim Taylor a run in place of Burns. Azam and Capdevielle soon followed.

Perhaps it was the subdued atmosphere at a sparsely populated Stadio Mario Battaglini. Maybe it was all the changes affecting the side's momentum. However, Gloucester found it difficult from then to lift the pace and conceded a number of unnecessary penalties at the breakdown which gave Rovigo more possession than they would have perhaps expected.

As a result, Rovigo enjoyed a good spell and a fine break from hooker Mahoney into the Gloucester 22 led to a score from replacement flanker Younes Anouer. German Bustos converted to the delight of the home crowd.

Gloucester obviously had the game well in the bag but only drawing the second half at this point would be regarded as an unlikely triumph for the Italians.

However, Tim Taylor scored a fine solo effort as time started to ebb away as he broke clear in midfield and then rounded the full back to score before converting his own try.

The pack then rumbled their way almost up to the line before Pasqualin released the backs and Taylor scampered his way over for his second before May showed good finishing skills to round off matters.

Job done and the points safely in the bag as Gloucester head home to round off their Amlin Challenge Cup pool 5 schedule at home to Agen on Thursday evening (kick off 7:45pm).

JC