

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2011

KINGSHOLM – LV= CUP

GLOUCESTER BLITZ IRISH TO EARN LV= CUP SEMI SPOT

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 41 LONDON IRISH 8

Match Report by Duncan Wood

Gloucester took on a very good London Irish side at Kingsholm on Saturday and simply ran riot in an opening 40 minutes which laid the platform for an impressive 41-8 victory.

The equation was Gloucester was simple as they came into the game. A win would equal a place in the LV= Cup semi-final. As simple as that. And the win was effectively in the bag after half an hour with the try scoring bonus point secured and the win within reach.

Irish had little answer to the wave after wave of Gloucester attacks. The onslaught was even more impressive given that Bryan Redpath's side were playing into a strong wind in the first period.

Gloucester were simply more up for it than the visitors and won virtually every physical challenge as well as unleashing their dangerous strike runners at every opportunity.

It resulted in a victory, the proportions of which few will have expected prior to the game and a home semi-final now awaits.

Conditions were dry at Kingsholm but there was a tricky swirling wind and two early cross-field kicks from the visitors drifted out on the full to prove the point.

Gloucester's first real attack came courtesy of a brutally efficient catch and drive which rumbled a full 30 metres, only coming to ground just a metre short of the Irish line. A five metre scrum followed but it went round 90 degrees and Gloucester lost the put in.

Irish couldn't clear, however. Tom Voyce safely gathered to claim territory before Tim Molenaar cut back against the grain and slipped a couple of tackles to score under the posts. Robinson converted to cap a promising start.

Gloucester were rampant and the second try came from a counter from deep involving Voyce again.

Irish repelled the first wave but couldn't cope with the pace of Charlie Sharples in midfield who broke the initial defensive line before shrugging off Ryan Lamb to just make the line. 12-0 after 16 minutes.

Gloucester were adventurous, perhaps a little bit too adventurous as they conceded a couple of penalties in their own half but Ryan Lamb rapped his first kick at goal off the post.

Gloucester's third try followed immediately. Fuimaono-Sapolu made a superb break and was well supported by Dave Lewis. The scrum half's kick ahead was meant for the flying Sharples but punched dead by Sailosi Tagicakibau who conceded a penalty try and was also yellow carded. Robinson converted for 19-0.

Kingsholm was buzzing although the penalty try was perhaps a trifle harsh as the bounce of a rugby ball means there was no guarantee that Sharples would have gathered and scored. Few were complaining though!

The restart was knocked on and the visitors took advantage of the error to camp in the home 22. A penalty for a high tackle followed and Lamb opened the Exiles account with a 26th minute penalty.

However, George Stowers dropped the restart and a team mate picked it up in an offside position. Gloucester kicked to the corner, then executed a smart, short lineout to Jim Hamilton who used every inch of his giant frame to reach over for the bonus point try before the half hour.

The one way traffic continued. Dave Lewis pinned Irish back with a superb touchfinder and Gloucester nicked the throw. Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu again breached the midfield defence and timed his pass superbly for Olly Morgan to canter over.

The wind dragged Robinson's well struck conversion wide of the posts but Gloucester were 29-3 up after 36 minutes.

A blistering first half came to an end with Gloucester still pressing despite having delivered one of their halves of the season. Five tries in the bank already and one foot in the LV= Cup semi-finals.

However, there were still 40 minutes to play and rugby can be a funny game so there remained a job to do in the second half.

Gloucester's pack duly started the second period like men possessed, driving their counterparts back and forcing the Exiles to defend their own line as though their lives depended on it.

However, despite a couple of Irish lineouts stolen and a wonderful break from Nicky Robinson, no further score ensued.

A good spell followed for the visitors with Ryan Lamb evoking memories of some of his better days in a Gloucester shirt with one lively break. Replacements came and went for both sides with the obvious impact on the flow of the game.

When a score did come on 55 minutes, it was a soft one for the visitors as Chris Hala'ufia brushed off an attempted tackle and romped home from 30 metres out. The difficult day for the goal kickers continued as Lamb couldn't convert.

Gloucester were now clearly playing well within themselves and, going into the final quarter, the game was drifting with the excitement of the first half having evaporated as errors started to dominate.

Jonny May and Charlie Sharples lifted the crowd briefly as they almost combined to set the latter away but a turnover followed as the ball was recycled with a score threatening.

The score did finally come, on 72 minutes, as Qera scooped up a less than perfect pass in midfield and broke a tackle before accelerating and diving over. 34-8 and the win now safely secured.

Lamb nearly picked off a pass in midfield before the current talented Gloucester ten Freddie Burns conjured up another score.

Burns' chip and gather in midfield opened up Irish before a superb offload out of the back door freed the flying Charlie Sharples who just made the corner. Burns converted in style.

There was just time for perennial Kingsholm favourite Chris Hala'ufia to won more fans locally with a high shot in midfield but nothing could take the gloss of Gloucester's win.

JC