

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2011

ADAMS PARK – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

DOGGED GLOUCESTER GUTS OUT WASPS WIN

LONDON WASPS 9 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 10

Match Report by Duncan Wood

In conditions more akin to mud wrestling than to running rugby, Gloucester triumphed for only the second time in thirteen visits to Adams Park earning a narrow and nervy 10-9 victory over Wasps on Sunday.

It went down to the wire. A 10-0 half time lead which had been earned through superbly playing the conditions had been slowly whittled by the boot of Dave Walder.

The Wasps fly half slotted three penalty goals as the gap narrowed to 10-9 and the feeling steadily grew that the home side were going to snatch the points. However, Gloucester stood firm. Their discipline was magnificent in defence in the latter stages and a crucial win was secured.

A short turnaround now beckons with London Irish the visitors to Kingsholm on Friday evening but this win is a huge morale boost.

Conditions were pretty grim in High Wycombe as the game approached with persistent rain leaving areas of surface water on the pitch although things relented as the game got underway.

Wasps had an early scare as a turnover gave Nicky Robinson a chance to clear into acres of space. Ben Jacobs got back but was a little too relaxed with his clearance which Charlie Sharples charged down only for the ball to run dead.

The opening stages were predictably tight given the handling conditions with both sides keeping it tight and boot being put to ball frequently with neither side really getting on top.

Joe Simpson looked lively, however, and his counter attack on 12 minutes almost opened up Gloucester but the kick ahead for the support to chase ran dead.

And the ball ran Gloucester's way again on 17 minutes. No-one claimed Sharples high kick, a Wasps hand then slapped it back loosely and James Simpson-Daniel swooped to hack on and pounce on the ball before it ran dead. Robinson converted for a 7-0 lead.

Handling didn't get any easier and the arm wrestle up front continued but Gloucester were able to stretch their lead with a 25th minute penalty from Robinson.

The Gloucester front row were relishing the conditions and had their counterparts in all sorts of bother and a couple of penalties were an appropriate award.

Nicky Robinson was also using the conditions well and pinning the home side back with a series of well-judged kicks as the rain teemed down.

The pack almost conjured up another score just before half time as a rolling maul saw Darren Dawidiuk power into the home 22 but the supporting Paul Doran-Jones was penalised for holding on in the tackle.

However, half time came without further event and Gloucester could reflect on a job well done at this point.

The pack had fronted up and were edging it in the scrums while the half backs were pushing Wasps back with their kicking game.

Chances had been few and far between but James Simpson-Daniel had pounced when one presented itself to earn Gloucester a deserved lead.

Wasps were bound to come back hard in the second half and Bryan Redpath's side would have to be wary of the likes of Joe Simpson, Richard Haughton and Tom Varndell who can turn a game in an instant.

A steady start was needed but Wasps were immediately gifted a penalty opportunity after a knock on by James Simpson-Daniel and Dave Walder bisected the posts with ease to make the score 3-10 after 44 minutes and promptly added a second just two minutes later.

Robinson had a 51st minute chance to respond and open up a little breathing space but his penalty attempt from distance dipped just under the crossbar.

However, the Gloucester pack earned him another chance just minutes later as Wasps pulled down a rolling maul only for the kick to stay just wide. Only time would tell if the missed kicks would matter.

The tension rose as the game edged into the final quarter with Wasps starting to dominate possession and Gloucester working hard in defence. It was still anyone's game.

And it became even tighter on 64 minutes when Walder narrowed the gap to 9-10 after Gloucester were inexplicably penalised at a scrum. The nerves were jangling.

There was also a lengthy break in place as James Simpson-Daniel and Tom Varndell both got injured in the same phase of play and both, sadly, left on stretchers.

Time ticked by like an eternity as Wasps employed their kick and drive game to get within possible drop goal range but Walder's 75th minute effort never got high enough to threaten.

Gloucester's big ball carriers opted to try and run down the clock. It wasn't pretty but it was effective and even a last-ditch penalty miss from Robinson couldn't ruin the mood.

Four very important points secured on the road and up to fourth in the table.

JC