

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2011**

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

MAGNIFICENT SEVEN IN A ROW FOR GLOUCESTER

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 23 LONDON IRISH 9

Match Report by Duncan Wood/Tim Lamden

Gloucester Rugby extended their winning home record and moved to third place in the Aviva Premiership table on Friday evening with a gritty 23-9 victory over London Irish at Kingsholm.

If anyone turned up expecting a repetition of the one sided 41-8 romp between the same two sides a fortnight ago then they would have been sadly disappointed.

What they saw was a far more even contest with London Irish looking much more like the side that has performed so well in the Premiership in the past two seasons.

In fact, when Gloucester looked comfortably poised and ready to kick on when leading 23-9 in the second half, the visitors unleashed a volley of assaults on the Gloucester line which tested the home defence to the max.

However, despite the late Irish flourish, Gloucester were good value for the win with the pack in particular relishing the battle up front and coming out on top more often than not.

After a cautiously tame start from both sides, Gloucester were the first to trouble the scoreboard with a Nicky Robinson penalty from near the halfway line after Irish were caught failing to move away at the breakdown.

Minutes later Irish showed real threat when they charged down Nicky Robinson's attempt to clear from behind the Gloucester line forcing winger Tom Voyce to scramble back and carry the ball into touch.

The home side were penalised at the ensuing lineout enabling Irish fly-half Chris Malone to bring the sides level with a penalty on the right after 12 minutes.

With the ball rolling loose near their own line, Gloucester were perhaps lucky to escape at the expense of just three points and it seemed to have only a galvanising effect on the side.

Voyce was looking sharp and swift hands saw the winger suddenly finding himself in space along the opposite touchline. Surging down the wing he was eventually tracked down by the covering Irish defence but Gloucester were able to recycle quick ball with Paul Doran-Jones almost wriggling his way clear.

After a catalogue of Gloucester phases, the referee eventually awarded a penalty on 17 minutes for an Irish offside in the middle of their 22. Robinson added the easy three points to put Gloucester back ahead at 6-3.

The Cherry and Whites really had the momentum behind them now and a powerful drive into the Irish 22 from hooker Scott Lawson on 22 minutes found strong support from the rest of the pack.

The Irish try line quickly descended into a heap of bodies as the forwards desperately attempted to drive themselves over the line time and again with green shirts desperately blocking the way.

Flanker Andy Hazell came close but it was a pirouetting Luke Narryway that eventually succeeded in touching down on 24 minutes. Robinson converted to give Gloucester a 13-3 lead.

Unfortunately it was Hazell's last contribution as injury forced him from the field with Akapusi Qera replacing him on the openside.

Qera quickly made an impact and on 28 minutes the Fijian was first to react to a misjudged Irish pass, collecting the loose ball and releasing an increasingly threatening Voyce.

The advancing winger was eventually held up on the floor by Irish prop Clarke Dermody and referee David Rose showed no more patience sending the tight head to the sin bin. Robinson slotted the subsequent penalty wide on the left on 30 minutes to extend Gloucester's lead to 16-3.

The final ten minutes of the half were played out with Gloucester in the ascendancy only for the home side to concede a penalty at the death which Irish wing Tom Homer knocked over to bring the visitors to within a converted try at 16-6[*sic*].

The opening exchanges of the second period were going to be crucial and the Exiles came out looking dangerous and, on 43 minutes, Homer found himself in a fantastic position on the left flank with just one final Gloucester defender to beat.

The winger was unable to deliver the decisive pass to full-back Topsy Ojo who bundled the ball forward just short of the Gloucester line. However, referee Rose ruled that an early tackle impeded Ojo and Malone stroked home the penalty to cut the deficit to 16-9.

Gloucester may have been shaken but they opted to take control of their own destiny and take the game to the visitors.

On 47 minutes, the ball was spun wide and number eight Narraway delivered a deft offload to find Olly Morgan in space.

The full-back motored toward the last defender before slipping an inside pass for Qera to score. Robinson converted and Gloucester reasserted their lead at 23-9.

Four minutes later, Gloucester looked like scoring again as the forwards mixed it well with the backs.

Nicky Robinson was put through into space in the Irish 22 and was just unable to collect his chip ahead with the ball bouncing unkindly with a try beckoning.

Robinson was having a fine game and his astute tactical kicking was causing Irish problems while his goalkicking was on the money.

However, the visitors were not prepared to give in and regrouped well, retaining possession and testing the Gloucester defence.

On 65 minutes, the Exiles pack found themselves camped on the Gloucester line in an almighty battle of driving bodies that seemed to mirror Gloucester's onslaught on the same line in the first half.

The home side's defence was tested to the limit as the Irish pack peppered the line with drives and victory seemed sealed with a tremendous Gloucester turnover after a seemingly endless series of rucks that Fuimaono-Sapolu hoofed clear.

Irish came back, searching for the score that would guarantee Gloucester a nervous last few minutes. Desperate defence followed and Dave Lewis was yellow carded.

However, the line was defended proudly and the visitors were denied even a consolation score as Gloucester secured their seventh win in a row to head into next weekend's key fixture at Northampton Saints in good spirits.