

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SUNDAY, MARCH 20, 2011

FRANKLIN'S GARDENS – LV= CUP

GLORIOUS GLOUCESTER CLINCH LV= CUP GLORY

NEWCASTLE FALCONS 7 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 34

Match Report by Duncan Wood

After losing two Anglo Welsh finals in a row, Gloucester banished those bad memories, made it third time lucky and lifted the trophy, thanks to an emphatic 34-7 win over the Newcastle Falcons.

It was Gloucester's eleventh win in a row in all competitions and sees the club clinch silverware for the first time since the European Challenge Cup win in 2006.

Just as importantly, Heineken Cup qualification for 2011-12 is now assured although Bryan Redpath's side still have plenty to play for as they currently occupy third place in the Aviva Premiership table.

The final scoreline looks comfortable but a dogged Falcons side hung in there for as long as they could and kept it to a 10 point margin until nearly the hour mark.

Had Jimmy Gopperth landed a couple of kickable penalties, it could have been even closer.

However, Gloucester gradually took a stranglehold on the game with the pack winning crucial possession and Nicky Robinson dictating play superbly.

Gloucester deserve their day in the sun and everyone connected with the club, supporters and playing staff alike will enjoy it.

At a sun kissed Franklin's Gardens, with the pitch in much better condition than the Premiership game a few weeks previously, Gloucester took the field to rapturous acclaim from a superb Cherry and White-clad following.

After the usual opening kicking ping pong, Gloucester quickly moved into the Newcastle 22 but were frustratingly penalised at the game's first scrum. The second scrum went far better after Alex Tait dropped an up and under and Gloucester had a platform to work from and they moved into the Falcons 22.

Quick ball across the backs saw Molenaar find Tom Voyce and the winger stepped inside his man and just made the line. Robinson's majestic touchline conversion made it a great start for Bryan Redpath's side.

The Falcons came back at Gloucester but the defence was up to scratch and a Nicky Robinson kick which rolled beautifully into touch in the Falcons 22 eased the pressure.

Gloucester upped the ante and almost unlocked the defence a second time. The Falcons held out but only at the expense of a Nicky Robinson penalty which made it 10-0 after 21 minutes.

Newcastle needed a boost and had an opportunity when Gopperth had a penalty from just inside the Gloucester half but the fly half was wide left with his effort.

It was breathless stuff with Gloucester forcing the pace. Sharples almost latched onto a cunningly placed Robinson grubber kick and the Falcons were showing the signs of making so many tackles early on.

However, Gloucester were on the wrong end of a couple of questionable refereeing calls, a blatant forward pass from Newcastle and Sharples being held back, but Gopperth couldn't take advantage and missed a very kickable 33rd minute penalty.

Gopperth redeemed himself moments later as he made a saving cover tackle on the flying Charlie Sharples who was released after a half break and superb pass from Robinson.

Play went on and Gloucester were awarded a penalty but Robinson just failed to draw the ball around and it shaded the left-hand post to leave the score at 10-0 and so it remained at half time.

Gloucester had dominated but perhaps not put the points on the board that they would have wanted.

The Falcons had defended grimly and shown the odd glimpse in attack but Gopperth would be kicking himself, though hopefully not literally, for the two missed penalties.

Matt Cox replaced Andy Hazell at half time and it remained to be seen how the openside stalwart would be missed but Gloucester made a good start stripping the Falcons of possession from the restart although the territory came to nothing.

In fact, Gloucester were a bit slack with possession in the opening skirmishes and almost created problems for themselves. This game was far from won yet.

However, Gloucester regrouped and Sharples' superb one-handed interception set up the position from which a penalty was won and Robinson made it 13-0 after 52 minutes.

As the hour mark approached, a moment of magic from Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu blew the game wide open.

Cutting back against the grain, he linked with Cox and Robinson with sleight of hand dazzling the defence and crossed untouched to the delight of the Gloucester support. Robinson's conversion was easy and made it 20-0.

Both teams started making replacements but Robinson by now was running the show and driving the Falcons back with a series of rolling touch finders.

A Newcastle error followed and the Gloucester backline clicked into gear as Voyce came in off the blindside wing, Burns hit the line at pace and put Sharples into the corner for the third try. Robinson converted again for 27-0 with just 12 minutes left.

Gloucester wasted another glorious try-scoring opportunity when Sharples chipped ahead with an unmarked Robinson inside him and then kept their line intact as they held a potentially try scoring Falcon off the ground over the line.

Credit to Newcastle, they kept coming and Eves blasted his way over the line with 5 minutes remaining, Gopperth converting to make the score 27-7.

It was a late flourish from the Falcons but too little, too late as Gloucester had the final word with a catch and drive try, credited to replacement hooker Darren Dawidiuk.

Nicky Robinson converted to cap a perfect day for Gloucester and the travelling support started their celebrations.

JC