

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, APRIL 2, 2011**

**KINGSHOLM –AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**GLOUCESTER LEAVE IT LATE TO CLIP FALCONS WINGS**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 34 NEWCASTLE FALCONS 9**

**Match Report by Duncan Wood**

Gloucester had to work tremendously hard to finally overcome a spirited effort from a dogged Newcastle side before three late tries secured the win and a try scoring bonus point.

A bonus point was probably the last thing on everyone's minds with the game delicately poised at 13 points to 9 with just a quarter of an hour remaining, but the Falcons were gradually ground down.

The game changing moment was when Luke Narraway spotted Henry Trinder lurking on the left wing, just out of the reaches of the blitz defence, and floated a beautifully weighted scoring pass.

It finally gave Gloucester a bit of daylight and tries three and four weren't far behind as Newcastle's confidence was fatally shattered.

The final score was harsh on the visitors who, in addition to stopping Gloucester playing their normal fluid game, also gave the Cherry and Whites more than one scare in defence.

It was especially tough on Jimmy Gopperth who once again pulled the strings for Newcastle with huge skill and made sure his side were never really out of the game.

However, the win keeps Gloucester in third place in the Aviva Premiership table and Friday evening sees them play their game in hand as they travel to Stockport to take on the Sale Sharks.

The two teams had, of course, met less than a fortnight ago. On that occasion Gloucester emerged triumphant and lifted the LV= Cup but, today at a sun kissed Kingsholm, it was Aviva Premiership points at stake.

It was an inauspicious start for Gloucester as Nicky Robinson sent the opening kick-off out on the full and then Akapusi Qera broke early from a set scrum. However, Jimmy Gopperth's penalty held up in the wind and was well short.

Errors continued to dog Gloucester in the opening stages and they were dealt as 7th minute blow when Nicky Robinson was forced to leave the field clutching the back of his leg. Tim Taylor replaced the Welsh international.

Gloucester regrouped and had a chance to open the scoring on 11 minutes as they forced Newcastle to concede a penalty wide out in front of the Shed but Freddie Burns dragged his kick wide. Burns had another chance two minutes later, straighter but further out. However, the young full back was again wide of the mark.

The visitors then gave the home crowd a scare as Gopperth spotted a slight gap and scampered his way up to the Gloucester 22 but Freddie Burns made an important tackle and the scramble defence did its job as a disappointing first quarter drew to a close.

The frustration grew as an overthrown Falcons lineout gave Gloucester good ball to work with and Jonny May thought he had outstripped the cover to score in the corner but was called back for a foot in touch.

Gloucester claimed the lineout and pummelled the Falcons line with Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu almost wriggling his way clear but a Burns penalty was the only reward to open the scoring after 24 minutes.

And the first try duly followed. Quick lineout ball off the top was fizzed into midfield where Tim Molenaar made the initial inroads and found the flying Burns in support who broke a tackle before sprinting home. Burns converted his own try for 10-0.

The Falcons hit back and a break by the lively Jimmy Young took play into the home 22. Gloucester got back but were offside in the defensive line and Gopperth drilled home the penalty.

And Gopperth repeated the feat on 32 minutes when Gloucester chasers were ruled to have got in front of Rory Lawson's box kick and therefore offside. 10-6 and the game still very much in the melting pot.

When the Kiwi drove home his third penalty on 37 minutes to make the score 10-9, the unease around Kingsholm rose palpably.

Half time came and Gloucester came in to regroup to muted applause. It had been a subdued first half display and Jimmy Gopperth was marshalling the Falcons superbly.

Whether kicking tactically or at goal, the Newcastle fly half was the key figure in the game at present and Gloucester had to figure out a way to keep the ball away from him.

To do that, they would have to make better use of their own possession. Too frequently an unforced error halted momentum or the kick downfield was too far for the chasers to get after it.

Gloucester did come out looking slightly more energised, presumably responding to the half time team talk, but suffered another injury scare when Freddie Burns required lengthy treatment.

The pack went back to basics and almost drove over from a catch and drive but the Falcons just held out, at the expense of a penalty, and Burns kicked his second penalty for 13-9 after 47 minutes.

The visitors were still looking lively and yet another turnover gave the Falcons a chance to break and only a forward pass prevented them from really threatening the Gloucester line after Sheriffe and Tu'ipulotu made good ground.

Gloucester were struggling to get out of their own half and referee Dean Richards was winning no friends in the Shed with a string of decisions against Gloucester. The Falcons had a 5m lineout near the home line but the Gloucester pack dug deep to keep the line intact.

There was plenty of effort from Bryan Redpath's side but the passes just weren't sticking and only one score separated the sides as both coaches made changes to try and change the game.

Finally, a moment of vision and brilliance from Luke Narryway opened up the Falcons. Spotting the blitz defence up in a hurry, the number eight floated a pass perfectly over the top for Henry Trinder to take it in his stride and score. Tim Taylor converted for 20-9 after 65 minutes and the sigh of relief could be heard in Cheltenham!

Gloucester now had their tails up and superb interplay between backs and forwards almost brought about a third try until Newcastle number eight Ally Hogg took out Rory Lawson as Gloucester sought to recycle and was yellow carded.

Newcastle were creaking as a cleverly worked catch and drive opened up the blind side and Scott Lawson popped the ball up for Jonny May to score in the corner. Taylor added a superb touchline conversion to effectively put the game to bed.

Gloucester now went after the bonus point and the Falcons valiantly tried to resist until Alasdair Dickinson burst through and found Rory Lawson in support who dived over gleefully. Taylor again added the extras.

As Kingsholm erupted at the final whistle, there was a mixture of delight and relief at a scoreline that could only have been dreamed off just minutes before.

However, it's another five points in the bag and another step closer to the Aviva Premiership playoffs.