

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, APRIL 16, 2011

WELFORD ROAD – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

LAST GASP TRY EARNS THRILLING DRAW FOR GLOUCESTER
AT TIGERS

LEICESTER TIGERS 41 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 41

Match Report by Duncan Wood

Just as Alesana Tuilagi's hat trick looked to have ruined Gloucester's afternoon, up popped Eliota Fuimoano-Sapolu whose last-minute interception earned his side a 41 all draw against the Leicester Tigers.

It was a belter of a game and one where Gloucester, despite a valiant effort, seemed destined to finish second best.

Alesana Tuilagi has been a nemesis for Gloucester in the past and he lived up to his reputation on Saturday afternoon as a 17 minute hat trick seemingly left Gloucester's hopes of a Welford Road win in tatters.

It turned Gloucester's 17-13 half time lead into a deficit and left Bryan Redpath's side chasing the game against a formidable outfit.

To their credit, Gloucester weren't done and Andy Hazell's 30 metre sprint to the line with quarter of an hour to go got his side to within one score and Tim Molenaar's effort levelled matters.

Even then, a Twelvetrees try for the Tigers seemed destined to break Gloucester's resolve but Fuimaono-Sapolu snaffled possession with no time on the clock and romped home to score with Freddie Burns showing nerves of steel to land the vital conversion.

It was no less than Gloucester deserved and showed just how much team spirit and camaraderie there is in this squad.

Other sides would have been swept aside by Leicester's second half efforts but Gloucester can take heart from the three points which keeps them in third place in the table.

Brett Deacon led out Gloucester on his first return to his former stamping ground on a dry and bright afternoon at a sold-out Welford Road with conditions looking nigh on perfect for rugby.

After the disappointment of last week's defeat at the Sale Sharks, Gloucester were looking to put in a decent performance at the home of the champions who had a point to prove themselves having bowed out of Europe the week before.

Gloucester had to endure some early pressure but made their most of their first foray into home territory when a long pass from quick line out ball found Olly Morgan steaming into the line and the full back used the man outside him as a decoy to canter over the line. Burns converted.

The lead was short lived. Castrogiovanni caught Morgan as the fullback took a high ball and possession was quickly turned over. Swift hands transferred the ball wide to Scott Hamilton who touched down. Flood converted to level the scores while Morgan was led off the field injured.

Some entertaining end to end rugby followed, with both sides threatening in attack. However, defence just about won the day until Flood nudged Leicester in front with a 17th minute penalty when his pack won a penalty off a Gloucester scrum put in deep in the visitors 22.

Gloucester were having their moments and Henry Trinder's sparkling 40 metre break deserved a better outcome but the support just couldn't retain their composure with the Tigers stretched.

Burns missed a 24th minute penalty but caught the home side napping with a quick tap shortly afterwards and Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu took the offload to score Gloucester's second and stun the home crowd. Burns converted to take his side into a 14-10 lead after 25 minutes.

Flood drilled home another penalty on 29 minutes as the Tigers scrum forced another offence out of Gloucester as play continued to ebb and flow.

The home side rued a missed opportunity as they couldn't finish off Thomas Waldrom's break from halfway or benefit from a subsequent Gloucester lineout failure and Burns was short with a penalty attempt from inside his own half after the clearance downfield, only to make amends on 37 minutes to make it 17-13.

Gloucester duly took a 17-13 lead into half time which was possibly beyond the dreams of even their wildest supporter and a strange hush descended on Welford Road.

Dogged defence had kept the Tigers at bay allied with some smart tactical kicking and no little threat in attack. It had been a very good first half but a long, hard 40 minutes lay ahead.

And, so it proved. The Tigers were quickly on the front foot and the pack laid the platform with some powerful drives before the ball was switched into midfield where Alesana Tuilagi was just too powerful and made the line. Flood converted.

Moments later, Tuilagi hit the line at pace and was simply too big and quick and dived over for his second and Leicester's third. Flood again added the extras for 27-17. It had been a blistering start to the second half for the home side.

Gloucester had been rocked but dusted themselves off and Burns stroked home a 51st minute penalty to get his team back within one score.

Unfortunately, that man Tuilagi promptly struck again. Twelvetrees made the initial break and Manu Tuilagi took the ball on before Matt Smith floated a pass inside for Tuilagi to stroll over. Flood again converted for 34-20.

Gloucester weren't done and Matt Cox showed hands worthy of a centre as he slipped the ball on for Andy Hazell to sprint home from 30 metres. Burns' conversion made it 34-27 and interesting with 17 minutes to play.

And it was even more interesting when Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu's inspired counter attack resulted in Tim Molenaar stepping inside the last man and scoring Gloucester's fourth try. Burns kept his cool to level the scores.

However, Flood's inside pass to Waldrom split the defensive line straight afterwards and the pass was timed perfectly for Billy Twelvetrees to sprint home despite Rory Lawson's valiant effort to get to him. Flood was again on target to rub salt into the wounds.

It was a heart-breaking moment but still Gloucester fought as time ticked away. Chances were carved out but they were fleeting and duly snuffed out until Fuimaono-Sapolu's timely intervention.

JC