

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, AUGUST 26, 2011

KINGSHOLM – FRIENDLY

GLOUCESTER TURN ON THE STYLE AGAINST RUSSIA FOR SINBAD

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 47 RUSSIA 7

Match Report by Duncan Wood

It was James Simpson-Daniel's big night at Kingsholm and his Gloucester team mates did him proud as they romped to a 47-7 win over Russia on Friday evening.

It was an impressive win especially as the rain teemed down for most of the evening. Russia were game opponents but simply not quite a match for Bryan Redpath's side.

It was a tricky night for former Gloucester favourites Kingsley Jones and Henry Paul who had to watch on helplessly as their charges were put to the sword.

But the Russians did them proud in terms of application, albeit in a losing cause.

For Gloucester, it was a comfortable win but far stiffer tests lie in wait particularly at Franklin's Gardens next Sunday against Northampton.

After the stuttering performance against London Welsh a week last Saturday, Gloucester started with purpose and almost pushed the Russians back over their own line in the first couple of minutes from a well-executed catch and drive.

A knock on halted that move but Gloucester promptly drove the Russians off their own ball and Gareth Evans picked up to drive over and score on his first team debut. Tim Taylor added the extras.

The weather wasn't being kind on Sinbad's big night as the rain teemed down and made handling difficult. A backdrop of thunder and lightning also enlivened proceedings.

The Kingsholm crowd didn't have long to wait for Simpson-Daniel to shine. A swivel of the hips and he was halfway through a gap, timing his offload to perfection to Olly Morgan who held off the final tackler to touch down. 12-0 to Gloucester after 12 minutes.

A period of errors followed, understandable in the conditions, until centre Jonny May burst through the Russian midfield on 20 minutes and accelerated clear. The full back covered hopefully but May simply changed his angle without losing pace to leave the would-be tackler floundering and coasted home. Taylor converted easily for 19-0.

Darren Dawidiuk quickly extended the lead as he caught the Russian fringe defence napping and a quick show of the ball had him romping home untouched. Taylor again added the extras.

The visitors were competing gamely but their set piece was letting them down. The Gloucester pack were dominating at scrum time and the Russian hooker couldn't find his jumper at lineout time.

Gloucester were looking sharp and May sprinted over for his second after a neat half break and beautifully timed offload from Dave Lewis. Taylor converted to take the lead to 33-0 which was the half time score.

Despite the conditions, it had been an entertaining affair for the Gloucester faithful who had turned out in force to pay tribute to Simpson-Daniel and also see how the team bounced back from last weekend.

Gloucester were still playing with ambition and were simply a class above the gallant Russians who were looking down the barrel of a fourth straight defeat on this World Cup warm up tour.

If anything it had been a little too easy for Gloucester – was this the workout they needed ahead of Northampton a week on Sunday?

To be fair, the Russians came out looking as though they'd been on the receiving end of a fearsome half time team talk and took the game to Gloucester in the opening stages.

They got nothing for their endeavours, however, and morale would have sunk even lower when Gloucester marched downfield and Tim Taylor scampered over the line after good build up work from the pack before converting his own try.

It was duly followed by a popular score for Lesley Vainikolo who had been restricted to mostly decoy duties thus far but took the ball on the crash to bounce off a couple of tackles on his way to the line. Freddie Burns added the conversion.

Down 47-0, the Russians were still fighting and finally got their reward on 62 minutes when Alexander Khrokin barrelled his way over the line with full back Igor Klyuchnikov adding the conversion.

As the game entered its final 10 minutes, May intercepted and looked set to sprint home for his hat trick but was surprisingly caught from behind as still the Russians battled although there was now only pride at stake.

There was a brief moment of alarm as Olly Morgan was taken out late after a kick ahead but the full back recovered after lengthy treatment and the culprit, Vladimir Botvinnikov, was yellow carded.

And, despite the crowd yearning for a fairytale score for James Simpson-Daniel, it wasn't to be. Gloucester pressed in the final stages and Charlie Sharples almost latched on to an ambitious cross kick from Freddie Burns but it was as close as Gloucester came.

Simpson-Daniel was sympathetically replaced just a couple of minutes from time and received a rousing reception as the Kingsholm crowd rose to its feet to pay tribute to one of its favourite sons.