

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2011

TWICKENHAM STOOP – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY
QUINS PUT GLOUCESTER TO THE SWORD AT THE STOOP
HARLEQUINS 42 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 6

Match Report by Duncan Wood

For the second season in a row at the Stoop, Gloucester were swept aside by a rampant Harlequins side and suffered a 42-6 defeat in the Aviva Premiership on Saturday afternoon.

After a reasonably even opening few minutes, Gloucester were second best to a Harlequins side who played the conditions perfectly.

Time and again, the Harlequins kickers pinned Gloucester back deep in their own half and seemingly executed their tactical plan perfectly, daring them to run from deep.

Gloucester could barely get out of their own half and the home side enjoyed a glut of possession which they made good use of.

Wave after wave of attack smashed into the Gloucester defence and, although every player tackled manfully, something had to give sooner or later.

A significant penalty count against the Cherry and Whites didn't help nor did a lineout which misfired on occasion. Gloucester just couldn't get into the game.

As a result, the home side were dominant and, with Nick Evans once again pulling the strings in expert fashion, Harlequins were good value for the win and Gloucester could have few complaints.

There were odd flashes of hope but the ball never quite went to hand or was turned over and there wasn't even the bonus of a consolation score.

Conditions had looked good in the run up to kick off but, just before the teams appeared, the heavens opened. What effect would it have?

Both teams started in positive fashion despite the slippery ball but the first incident of real note was Nick Wood leaving the field with a blood injury on three minutes.

Gloucester were first on the scoreboard. A stolen lineout in the Quins 22 set up good field position and the home side transgressed as Gloucester looked for quick ruck ball. Freddie Burns made no mistake for 3-0 after six minutes.

Harlequins responded well and had a couple of good attacking positions but lost control of the greasy ball in contact and Gloucester were quick to snaffle possession.

It was fairly helter-skelter stuff and there was little room to move in midfield with Jordan Turner-Hall in particular flying up in defence to make tackles.

The first try scoring chance was on 15 minutes as Mike Brown sprinted through on to a measured grubber kick from Nick Evans. He controlled the hack on but knocked on in the act of stooping to pick up the ball and score. It was a let off for Gloucester.

Much of the play was in the Gloucester 22 at this point but the defence was committed and tackles were being made. Possession was needed, however.

Quins finally broke through on 19 minutes. Nick Evans switched play to the blindside where Lowe and Brown combined to draw the last man and send Sam Smith scooting down the 5 metre channel and over for the try. Evans added the conversion for 7-3.

The home had their tails up and Nick Runciman had to scramble back to deny Karl Dickson after a powerful break from Turner-Hall from his own 22. A penalty followed and Evans made no mistake for 10-3.

Gloucester were struggling to get a foothold in the game. Any possession they got was received deep in their own half and they were limited to kicking and chasing. On the contrary, Quins looked lively and confident.

Confident enough to kick for the corner twice on the half hour rather than go for goal. And, at the second time of asking, they drove over for the second try, flanker Luke Wallace claiming the try. Evans missed the conversion and Gloucester had to dig deep until half time.

Gloucester finally got a break on 36 minutes as Harlequins collapsed a scrum near halfway and Freddie Burns confidently slotted a long-range penalty to reduce the arrears to 15-6 and the heavens promptly opened again.

It mattered not to Quins who capitalised on Gloucester failing to deal with the restart and Evans kicked another penalty, in off the left hand upright, as a tackler was slow to roll away.

18-6 the score at half time and Harlequins were good value for the lead. They had dominated possession and, as a result, were winning the territorial battle.

Gloucester were battling but Quins are too good a team to squander that much possession and looked dangerous in attack.

The Cherry and Whites had to regroup at half time and come up with a plan to get back into the game. Otherwise, a long second half beckoned.

Conditions were brighter as the second half got underway but the momentum of the game was similar to the first half with Quins quickly back on top.

Gloucester didn't help their cause with a lineout throw adjudged to be not straight in their own 22 but escaped as two Quins players collided and knocked on trying to gather another cunning grubber from Evans with a try on the cards.

Another squandered lineout then almost cost Gloucester on two fronts as Matt Cox was yellow carded for side entry at a ruck but Evans' penalty hit the upright and stayed out.

It had been gallant defence but Gloucester cracked again on 55 minutes. Evans worked his magic in midfield and sent George Lowe crashing into the 22. Quick ball then had Gloucester outnumbered and Ugo Monye dived over in the corner. Evans converted from the touchline for a 25-6 lead.

As they went looking for the bonus point, Quins were rampant and Gloucester seemingly on the ropes and another catch and drive quickly produced the fourth try. Wallace was again awarded the try and Evans again converted.

Evans departed the scene but his replacement, Rory Clegg, was quickly into the game adding a 65th minute penalty.

And, if ever any moment summed up Gloucester's day, it was on 67 minutes when Charlie Sharples couldn't benefit from a Quins mistake, knocking on as he tried to reach down and gather a loose ball with no-one in front of him and only a few metres to go.

The agony wasn't over as Chris Brooker sprinted home from a ruck a few metres out from the Gloucester line without a finger laid on him. Clegg added the conversion.

It summed up a bad day at the office for Gloucester who had the long coach ride home to reflect and start to plan how to bounce back next weekend against local rivals Bath.