

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2011**

**KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**GLOUCESTER BOUNCE BACK AND BATTLE TO BATH VICTORY**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 23 BATH RUGBY 6**

**Match Report by Duncan Wood**

No quarter asked and none given. That's always the way with Gloucester vs. Bath encounters. And this one was no different with Gloucester overcoming a strong Bath start before emerging 23-6 winners.

It was a final scoreline that would have been considered unlikely after the opening half hour when Bath completely dominated possession and took the game to their hosts.

It was pretty much all hands to the pumps in defence and the fear lingered that, following on from last weekend's loss at Harlequins, an early deficit would have been tricky to overcome.

However, back in front of their own supporters, Gloucester dug deep and doggedly refused Bath to accumulate any more than two penalties.

And, on the half hour, the comeback started as the Gloucester pack kept it tight and took it to the Bath eight up front.

Dawidiuk's try from a catch and drive gave Gloucester self-belief and they never looked back as the Kingsholm crowd got into the game and backed their heroes in great style.

The game was won either side of half time as Tim Taylor's boot added to the lead although Gloucester had to withstand a ferocious Bath fightback in the final few minutes to earn their second Aviva Premiership win of the season.

The weather certainly was offering no excuses as the game kicked off with near perfect conditions at an expectant Kingsholm.

It was all Bath in the opening minutes as they dominated possession without ever really looking threatening although Tom Voyce had to work smartly to deal with a neat chip through from Sam Vesty.

However, all the fine defensive work was nearly undone as Bath exploited superiority of numbers on the blindside and Nick Abendanon made a good 50 metres. However, with a try threatening, the Gloucester defence held firm on the goal line and forced a knock on.

As the opening quarter drew to a close, it had been an uphill struggle for Gloucester. Starved of any meaningful possession, they were making tackle after tackle but defending with courage.

However, they were finally penalised for going in at the side of a ruck near their own line on 21 minutes and Sam Vesty made no mistake with the penalty for a 3-0 lead to the visitors.

At this point, any rare foray into the Bath half was being comfortably dealt with and turnovers punished by intelligent kicking from the Bath backs.

And the lead was doubled on 26 minutes as Gloucester were penalised at a lineout and Vesty's long kick hit the crossbar and bounced over.

Gloucester needed a spark and the pack did their best to provide it with a punishing driving maul from the Bath 22 which almost made it over the line.

Bath held out but at the expense of a penalty and Tim Taylor got Gloucester off and running with the penalty.

Another spell of Bath pressure followed but Tim Taylor's neat chip and gather from his own 22 got Gloucester moving forward as Olly Morgan and Charlie Sharples came up in support.

Gloucester moved into the Bath 22 and another catch and dive was illegally halted by Bath so Gloucester reloaded and drove over for a try from hooker Darren Dawidiuk. Taylor converted for a 10-6 lead.

After all the pressure in the opening half hour, Gloucester had looked down and out. However, Bath had failed to land the knockout blow and Bryan Redpath's side had picked themselves up off the ropes to land a sucker punch of their own.

For all Bath's pressure, Gloucester were looking superior up front – could this be the platform for victory?

Gloucester maintained the momentum at the start of the second half. Taylor added a 42nd minute penalty to extend the lead to 13-6 but was off target after 45 minutes. Lesley Vainikolo nearly added a second try but couldn't quite latch on to Tim Taylor's kick through.

It was now typically passionate derby day action with the tackles flying in thick and fast from both sides. It was probably Gloucester's best spell in terms of possession but Bath still looked dangerous.

Jonny May very nearly broke clear with that deadly turn of pace seen so often at Kingsholm but was just hauled down. Bath were up too quick in defence, however, and Taylor extended the lead on 59 minutes with his third penalty before making way for Freddie Burns.

The Gloucester pack were still looking powerful but Bath had a glimmer of hope on 65 minutes as they earned a kickable penalty but Vesty fluffed his lines and pushed his kick wide.

Vesty was promptly replaced by Tom Heathcote and the young fly half matched Vesty's effort by also pushing a penalty attempt wide right on 70 minutes as time started to count against Bath.

However, this game was far from won and a string of penalties allowed Bath to move dangerously into the Gloucester 22 and ultimately kick for the corner only for superb defence to drive Ryan Caldwell into touch.

With just five minutes to go, there was still drama. Former Kingsholm favourite Dave Attwood made a powerful break towards the line and offloaded out of the tackle but Bath lost the ball forward with the line beckoning.

Lesley Vainikolo was yellow carded for a high tackle, a decision unpopular with the home crowd, who erupted in delight as Jack Cuthbert dragged the penalty attempt wide.

And the last word was Gloucester's. Bath knocked on and Freddie Burns spotted space down field. His long kick was followed up by Charlie Sharples who outpaced Nick Scott to gather and score. Burns converted and the Gloucester supporters went home happy.

JC