

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2011

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

GLOUCESTER PIP IRISH IN HIGH TEMPO THRILLER

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 33 LONDON IRISH 30

Match Report by Duncan Wood

Gloucester Rugby and London Irish served up an absolute humdinger of a clash at Kingsholm on Saturday afternoon with the home team keeping their cool in the heat to edge it 33-30.

Defeat would have been harsh on either side in the circumstances and the visitors more than played their part in an absolute cracker of a game.

Three tries apiece and incidents galore played in conditions which would have had the players gasping for air in July let alone October.

It could have gone either way. The lead changed hands several times and neither side could quite put the other to bed. It was quite an advert for Aviva Premiership Rugby.

It was actually a disastrous start for Gloucester as they looked to build on the momentum of defeating Bath last weekend.

Having fielded a high kick, Tim Taylor looked for a long pass inside but in stepped Irish flanker Alex Gray who intercepted to run in under the posts. Homer added the conversion with ease.

As was the case last week, Gloucester hit back through the pack, forcing a penalty at an Irish put in. Taylor bisected the posts with confidence for 3-7 after five minutes.

However, that penalty was almost cancelled out as Gloucester held on in the tackle from the restart but Homer pushed a straightforward chance right of the posts.

The Exiles were punished immediately. Trinder made the initial line break and made good ground before finding Olly Morgan who drew the final man to give Tom Voyce a clear run to the corner. Taylor converted superbly from the touchline.

Gloucester were playing some of their highest tempo rugby of the season and Irish were struggling to live with it defensively and Taylor added a penalty for 13-7 after 16 minutes.

That said, the Exiles were showing plenty of ambition in attack and a searing break from Jonathan Joseph created panic in the Gloucester ranks. Quick ball was denied but at the expense of a penalty but Homer dragged his kick wide left from in front of the Shed.

It had been a breathless first quarter and both teams continued to try and play open rugby. The next score came from the boot though as Gloucester were penalised at a ruck and Homer made amends for his previous misses. 13-10 after 25 minutes.

The Gloucester pack responded and won another penalty at a set scrum, Nick Wood doing a job on his opposite number. Taylor went for the posts from halfway and just cleared the crossbar for a 16-10 lead.

Controversy then reigned as Chris Hala'ufia, no favourite here at Kingsholm after a previous incident, nearly took Olly Morgan's head off as he hit the fullback late after he kicked downfield. The Shed were baying for blood but only a yellow card followed.

Gloucester went for the jugular and kicked for the corner but Irish pulled it down illegally. A 5 metre scrum was opted for and a penalty try the result. Taylor added the extras for 23-10 after 33 minutes.

However, Irish produced a piece of magic as half time approached. Gloucester looked comfortable in defence but an inside pass from Bowden found Topsy Ojo cutting a great angle and the winger showed pace and agility to step the final man and score. Homer converted for 23-17.

The very beginning and ending of the half were disappointing for Gloucester but the period in between saw some great play.

The pack had continued their good work from recent weeks and there was more of a cutting edge in attack.

The visitors, though, were showing plenty themselves. They were defending resolutely and shown themselves well capable of hurting Gloucester in attack. The second half promised an awful lot.

And the visitors started it in confident style, running the ball from their 22 with Homer making a fine break before Jonny May could haul him down. Gloucester were slow getting back and caught offside in midfield allowing Homer to reduce the arrears to 23-20 with a penalty.

The Exiles then stunned Gloucester by taking the lead. Sharples took a high ball but was stripped of possession by Adam Thompstone. Irish quickly moved the ball wide and Shingler took a good angle to break the line and score. Homer converted for 23-27.

The response was immediate as Gloucester created space on the blindside and Darren Dawidiuk was able to ignore the unmarked Sharples outside him and blast his way to the line. Taylor again converted superbly from wide out to restore his side's advantage.

It was thrilling, it was end to end and there was barely time to take a breath in these unusually warm conditions!

The action continued to come thick and fast and Joseph's pace and ability to offload almost conjured up another try as Allinson took a quick tap but Sharples made a try saving tackle.

The Exiles had Gloucester pinned near their own line and a penalty followed as a rolling maul sapped the home defence and was pulled down illegally. Homer kept his cool to level the scores at 30 all after 58 minutes.

Freddie Burns had by now entered the fray and his audacious chip almost opened up the Exiles as Sharples ran onto it but couldn't quite get away. A penalty followed and Burns nudged Gloucester back in front.

James Simpson-Daniel took the field to great acclaim on 68 minutes and almost set up a great scoring position but Gloucester were harshly penalised for blocking. Irish then forced a 5 metre lineout but were bundled into touch.

Burns then had a 75th minute penalty opportunity to give Gloucester a bit of breathing space but agonisingly hit the upright. It was that kind of afternoon!

There was still one last chance for a score as an angled cross kick looked set to find Topsy Ojo but the ball bounced kindly for Gloucester and they ran out the clock with relief.

The win gives Gloucester their third from five starts this season although they now travel to Sale which has never been one of their favourite haunts in recent seasons.

JC