

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2011

EDGELEY PARK – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

SALE CLINCH NARROW 13-11 WIN OVER GLOUCESTER

SALE SHARKS 13 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 11

Match Report by Duncan Wood

It was a case of so near and yet so far for Gloucester against the Sale Sharks on Saturday afternoon as a second half comeback came just short and the home side edged it 13-11.

It was the proverbial game of two halves at Edgeley Park. The Sharks took the first period by 10 points to nil whereas Gloucester shaded the second by 11 points to three.

And Bryan Redpath and his side will be kicking themselves as they head back down the M6 as this was a game which was very winnable.

Gloucester definitely had the edge in the scrum and it seemed to be a case of just working the positions to be able to make this superiority count.

However, in the first half in particular, Sale had the upper hand in terms of the battle for position and Gloucester were trying to do too much from deep.

It was better in the second half and Henry Trinder's try hinted at a dramatic late comeback. However, Tim Taylor's conversion drifted wide and the Sharks were able to close out the game.

The outskirts of Manchester have not been a happy hunting ground for Gloucester in recent seasons. In fact, the Cherry and Whites last away win at Sale was in September 2001.

And Bryan Redpath's side were greeted to conditions all too familiar to them in these parts – drizzle teeming down from well before the 3pm kick off.

It was quite a contrast to conditions experienced last weekend at Kingsholm against London Irish. Gloucester, however, fielded an unchanged side from that game.

Gloucester started brightly, enjoying significant possession in the opening stages but got little change out of a robust home defence who were physical in the one-on-one tackles.

And Sharks fly half Nick MacLeod had the first chance of points on seven minutes as Gloucester went off their feet at a ruck. The fly half went for the posts from several metres inside his own half but was just short.

Given the conditions a tactical kicking duel was on the cards and neither side disappointed in that regard in the first ten minutes or so with both back threes having to field a barrage of high balls.

One area where Gloucester did appear to have a slight edge in the early exchanges was in the scrum and Lee Imiolek received a lengthy lecture from referee Davey on 15 minutes as Sale endured some uncomfortable moments.

But Sale did have a man in form in the shape of Sam Tuitupou. His ability to bounce off would be tacklers got Sale to within a metre or so of the Gloucester line after a period of pressure and skipper David Seymour took the offload to fight his way over for the game's first try. MacLeod converted for a 7-0 lead after 19 minutes.

Gloucester's pack responded well and immediately forced a penalty after a series of aborted scrums. However, head on to the posts, Tim Taylor was off target. A Sale water carrier was warned for loitering in front of the kicker but the miss stood.

The response from Bryan Redpath's side was to keep things tight, with the forwards looking to drive around the fringes but they were getting little change out of the home defence and minutes ticked by without much happening.

Sharks fly half MacLeod did excite the crowd out of their torpor on 40 minutes as he floated a cross kick for left wing Tuculet to chase but the ball skidded into touch.

Gloucester were then dealt a blow as the luckless Olly Morgan was led off the field clutching his arm to be replaced by Freddie Burns.

Moments later, Gloucester didn't release the tackled player. The penalty award was immediate and MacLeod bisected the posts for 10-0 at half time.

Truth be told, there wasn't that much between the two sides and it had been a first half largely to forget.

Sale had taken their chances and deserve credit for that but Gloucester were certainly going to have to step it up a gear in the second half.

And the pack delivered in the opening minutes of the second period, winning another penalty at scrum time. Taylor stepped up and scored Gloucester's first points to narrow the gap to 10-3.

However, Darren Dawidiuk was immediately penalised for pulling back a supporting runner off the ball only for the hitherto accurate MacLeod to miss a kickable penalty.

A better spell followed for Gloucester. Sharples linked with May to send the centre sprinting into the home 22 but a forward pass halted the move as the ball was recycled in a promising position.

Gloucester kept up the pressure, kicked for the corner and camped on the Sale line but were penalised for holding as the Sale defence held.

Still the pressure piled onto the Sale scrum and yet another penalty saw referee Davey lose patience and yellow carded tight head Henry Thomas. Taylor kicked the penalty for 10-6 after 56 minutes.

Sale then almost took advantage of Gloucester conceding a free kick for a delayed put in at the scrum. A quick tap almost saw Scott Mathie dart over but Gloucester just regrouped in time.

However, a penalty was conceded and MacLeod just threaded his kick inside the left hand upright to restore Sale's seven point advantage.

The home side then self-destructed as they tried to run back a long Burns kick from near their own line. The chase was good and Nick Wood stripped the ball off Addison. Gloucester moved it quickly through Dave Lewis and Henry Trinder slipped through a tackle to score. Taylor dragged his conversion wide but Gloucester had closed in to 13-11.

The pressure was on the home side and they did creak at times as Gloucester pressed for the go ahead score which frustratingly remained elusive.

Credit where it's due, Sale composed themselves in the final moments and were able to run out the clock to leave Gloucester angry and frustrated.

There's one consolation. Gloucester have an immediate chance to put the record straight as Sale come to Kingsholm next weekend in the LV= Cup opener.

However, at the moment, it's scant consolation ...