

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2011

KINGSHOLM – HEINEKEN CUP

CLINICAL QUINS GIVE GLOUCESTER A LESSON IN FINISHING

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 9 HARLEQUINS 28

Match Report by Duncan Wood

Gloucester dominated territory and possession in a physical Heineken Cup encounter at Kingsholm on Saturday but were ruthlessly picked off by a high-flying Harlequins side who maintain their unbeaten start to the season.

Sometimes a final scoreline doesn't really reflect what has happened during the course of the preceding 80 minutes and today was one of those days.

The visitors' tackle count must have been huge as Gloucester created several great scoring opportunities. Yet Quins finished with three tries and Gloucester failed to cross the whitewash.

It was a master class in soaking up pressure and then making the most of the opportunities that come your way as Harlequins showed the style that has brought them such a great start to the season.

Gloucester were left to rue so many missed scoring chances but will also reflect on a lack of precision and composure when chasing the game in the second half.

When all is said and done though, the visitors were the better side and well worthy of their win while Gloucester are left to lick their wounds and try to bounce back next weekend against Leicester.

The game started at breakneck pace with both teams trying to assert their superiority. Mike Tindall had one good early run but was halted by a muscular tackle from Jordan Turner-Hall.

Quick lineout ball gave the visiting backs a chance to run and a nice run around move created a two on one on the outside. Lesley Vainikolo stayed with his man and Mike Brown dummied his way inside to score. Evans added the easy conversion.

Vainikolo very nearly got the score straight back as he smashed aside a couple of would-be tacklers but was bundled into touch at the corner flag. The subsequent clearance was charged down and Qera knocked on in the act of scoring.

Gloucester won the penalty at the scrum and Freddie Burns struck a confident penalty to make it 3-7.

Quins were still looking very dangerous when on the front foot and a half break from Hopper saw Evans scamper into the 22. Brown took it on but Sam Smith knocked on near the line. Play came back for a Gloucester misdemeanour and Evans nailed the penalty for a 10-3 lead.

A searing midfield break from Henry Trinder lifted the crowd but the support wasn't quite with him and he stumbled taking on the last man. A Quins knock on as Gloucester looked to recycle halted the threat.

A good spell of pressure followed for Gloucester but they couldn't quite make the crucial break and had to settle for a 27th minute Burns penalty to make it 6-10.

Qera was everywhere and made a rampaging break after Gloucester claimed the restart. Quins got back to him but conceded a penalty which was too far out for Burns and the kick fell short.

Both teams had their moments as half time approached but it was Quins who finished well as they nicked a Gloucester lineout in the home 22.

The pressure was relentless for several phases before centre Matt Hopper went low as he drove for the line and was awarded the try. Evans' attempted conversion hit the post and stayed out but the visitors had a handy looking 15-6 lead at half time.

It had been all about taking chances in the first half. Gloucester had enjoyed plenty of possession and territory but had not quite been able to unpick the Quins defence.

The visitors, however, had made their most of the visits to the home 22 and generally looked a handful throughout.

The challenge was well and truly on for Gloucester to try and turn this around and they would have to do it without the rampaging Vainikolo who didn't emerge for the second half.

And the half got off to a grim start as the restart was dropped and picked up in an offside position and Evans duly made it 18-6, whereas Burns was off-target a couple of minutes later.

Gloucester needed a spark but were lacking a bit of composure although they got a break when Fa'asavalu was yellow carded for foul play and Burns added the resulting penalty.

Gloucester were visibly lifted and ambitious enough to attack from deep through the likes of May and Trinder but the Quins defence was robust despite being stretched at times.

And, just as Gloucester finally thought they'd broken through, Trinder lost control as he looked set to roll over the line after a great show and go from Burns.

The error was compounded as Gloucester tapped loosely from a lineout to gift Quins possession and Evans added his third penalty for 21-9 after a high tackle.

Still Gloucester pressed but they still couldn't break through with Voyce almost making the line on more than one occasion only for the Quins scramble defence to prevail.

Kickable penalties were turned down as Gloucester opted to kick into the corner but nothing came of it and Quins again showed their predatory instincts as Easter burst clear to score, after consultation with the TMO as he almost lost control. Evans converted for 28-9.

Gloucester went in search of what would have been a consolation score but even that escaped them as poor hands let them down again when a score looked on the cards.

JC