

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2011

KINGSTON PARK – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

GLOUCESTER PIPPED 26-25 AT NEWCASTLE FALCONS

NEWCASTLE FALCONS 26 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 25

Match Report by Duncan Wood

Despite outscoring their hosts by three tries to two, Gloucester paid the price for not making enough of a strong first half wind and slipped to a disappointing 26-25 defeat at Newcastle on Friday evening.

It was yet another week, yet another close one and yet another defeat by less than a score.

And what was particularly frustrating about this one was that Gloucester pretty much gift wrapped this one for a Falcons side who were desperate for a win.

Bryan Redpath's side got off to a flyer with the wind at their backs, led 20-10 at one point but frittered away the advantage and allowed the ice cool Jimmy Gopperth to do just enough to secure the win in the second half.

It was a bitterly disappointing outcome on a cold Newcastle night and Head Coach Redpath pulled no punches afterwards when he addressed the media.

And there's no time for Gloucester to feel sorry for themselves. A similar challenge lies in wait next week against Connacht and the Irish province will be just as physical and committed as Newcastle were tonight.

It's small margins for Gloucester at the moment – a botched set piece, a missed tackle, an unnecessary penalty given away.

Yet when they get it right, as they did for the Morgan and Simpson-Daniel tries, they can look so good...

As the game got underway, it wasn't quite as cold as it has been in years gone by but a tricky, swirling wind was present which threatened to play havoc with the respective kickers.

Gloucester were dealt a late blow as Jim Hamilton didn't feel right in the warm up. Peter Buxton came into the starting line-up and Shaun Knight onto the bench.

However, Gloucester got off to a flyer as Jimmy Gopperth failed to find touch into wind. The ball was moved left and then right and Olly Morgan was the spare man on the right and crossed untouched. Burns converted from the touchline for a 7-0 lead.

The restart has been an Achilles heel for Gloucester this season however and the Falcons reclaimed it before earning a penalty which Gopperth slotted with ease.

Gloucester were then caught napping at the ruck area as hooker Mayhew romped through untouched with seemingly nothing on and drew the final defender for Jordi Pasqualin to score against his former club. Gopperth converted for a 10-7 lead.

The Falcons were making a good fist of playing one out rugby and maintaining possession, a sensible tactic given they were playing into the wind but conceded a penalty at a Gloucester scrum on 14 minutes which Burns landed comfortably to level the scores.

Gloucester did seem to have the early edge in the scrum and this led to another opportunity for Burns to go for goal six minutes later and the fly half made no mistake for a 13-10 lead.

The Gloucester backs then worked a lovely move as James Simpson-Daniel looped around Fuimaono-Sapolu and accelerated smoothly into the gap. Not a finger was laid on him as he glided to the line. Burns added a fine conversion to extend the lead to 20-10.

However, the momentum was dealt a blow when Alasdair Strokosch was yellow carded and promptly paid the price.

Taiasina Tuifua made an initial line break before burly centre James Fitzpatrick took a straight line and smashed through the Gloucester midfield defence to storm home from 30 metres out. Gopperth added the easy conversion.

The Falcons played out the final couple of minutes of the half keeping it tight amongst the forwards and went into the break in touch and only trailing by 17 points to 20.

The home side would have the wind at their backs in the second half and this could prove to be crucial as could the defensive lapses which led to the Falcons tries.

Gloucester had shown what they could do with ball in hand and much more of this would be required and the Falcons had certainly given them a blueprint for playing into the wind.

And the lead was immediately wiped out as Fuimaono-Sapolu was ruled to have held on in the tackle and Gopperth needed no second invitation to make it 20 points apiece.

And when Mike Tindall was penalised for not releasing the tackled player, Gopperth stepped up and nudged the Falcons in front 23-20 after 50 minutes.

Gloucester then had a glorious chance to hit back as they charged down Jordi Pasqualin's kick in the home 22 but Peter Buxton couldn't gather the loose ball with a clear run to the line beckoning.

The Falcons moved patiently downfield working phase after phase. It was pretty turgid stuff but it advanced play a metre at a time until a penalty followed and Gopperth duly made it 26-20 on the hour.

Gloucester badly needed a spark and got it with 15 minutes to go as a well-executed catch and drive saw Scott Lawson break from the maul and scamper over. Burns' conversion, into the teeth of the wind, held up and was short and wide, and left Gloucester trailing by a point.

With just a few minutes remaining, Gloucester were forced to try their hand from deep and were eventually caught holding on in the tackle again. However, the metronomic Gopperth was, for once, off target.

Gloucester still gave it a go but time ran out on them despite the ball being shifted wide right to the bitter end and the search for a win at Kingston Park goes on.

JC