

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

MONDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2011

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY
SIX-TRY GLOUCESTER ROMP TO WASPS WIN
GLOUCESTER RUGBY 39 LONDON WASPS 10

Match Report by Duncan Wood

Gloucester Rugby gave their supporters the best Christmas present possible as an impressive performance saw them score six tries in a 39-10 win over London Wasps.

For some weeks now, Gloucester's games have been decided by the margin of one score or less; either a narrow win or a narrow defeat. Sooner or later, Bryan Redpath's side were going to click into gear and woe betide the side that stood in their way.

Today that happened to be Wasps and there was precious little that Dai Young's side could do about it.

Shorn of a number of nailed on first team starters (three have retired through injury since the start of the season alone), Wasps were soon going backward in the set piece and Gloucester scented blood.

With a surfeit of quality possession being served up, Freddie Burns and the young three quarters had time, space and, crucially, self-belief on their side.

Time and again they swept forward and the would-be Wasps tacklers were left grasping at thin air.

Just as importantly, the bounce of the ball started to go Gloucester's way and three of the four referrals to the TMO resulted in tries for the home side.

Long before the end, the outcome was decided and it was simply a question of how big the winning margin would be.

Wasps did have their moments in the first half but they were all too fleeting and the visitors will wonder what might have been had Richard Haughton not been halted by Freddie Burns' tap tackle with the game still in the balance.

All in all, a great way to sign off in 2011 and the team will travel to Saracens on New Year's Day in good spirits ahead of what will be a huge challenge.

Gloucester were forced to make one late change amongst the replacements. Andy Hazell took a bang to his thumb last weekend against Connacht and was replaced by Matt Cox.

That apart, both sides lined up as announced as eighth took on ninth in the Aviva Premiership table at a sold-out Kingsholm.

Gloucester have been accused of playing with a lack of confidence in recent weeks but opened up with real ambition

However, it was a catch and drive that opened the scoring as Gloucester drove from the Wasps 22 metre line leading to Luke Narryway touching down in the corner. Burns added a fine touchline conversion to cap a powerful statement of intent.

However, perhaps a touch of over confidence led to near disaster as a loose pass in midfield almost led to a Wasps breakaway try. Jonny May made the tackle and Jim Hamilton got back but at the expense of a penalty which Nicky Robinson pushed wide to the delight of the Shed.

There were then glimpses of Fuimaono-Sapolu and Burns in full flight as Gloucester took Wasps apart in the backs. Qera almost made the corner but Gloucester remained patient and Narryway put May over for the second try. Burns again converted for 14-0 after 16 minutes.

Wasps then enjoyed a good spell of possession and took full advantage of Gloucester conceding a free kick at a scrum in their own 22.

A few patient phases of play followed before the ball was shipped left for Elliot Daly to make the line. Robinson added a well struck conversion to make it 14-7 after 23 minutes.

It was Gloucester quickly back on the front foot but the Wasps defence was rock solid in the face of incessant pressure and a turnover at the breakdown led to a clearance downfield and the pressure was off.

Elliot Daly then had the self-confidence to take on a penalty attempt from fully five metres inside his own half but the wind, though behind his back, wasn't quite strong enough and the kick fell short although the line was good.

Wasps then paid the price for dallying with the ball available to play and the home pack pounced to drive through and claim possession.

The backs took it on with Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu handing off an opponent with disdain before Morgan fed May who tiptoed his way down the touchline to score a breathtaking try. Burns couldn't add the extras but it was 19-7 with five minutes to go to half time.

It wasn't all one way. A counter by Wasps saw Richard Haughton seemingly screaming down the touchline to score, only for a superb tap tackle from Freddie Burns to bring him to earth and save the day.

However, as time expired, Gloucester conceded a penalty head on to the posts and inside their own half and Robinson's kick just made it over the bar to make the half time score 19-10.

It had been a much better 40 minutes for Bryan Redpath's side who had played with real panache and quickly banished memories of last weekend's struggle against Connacht.

However, despite three good tries, Wasps were still offering enough in attack themselves to show that they could take advantage of any complacency in the home ranks.

The visitors had lost Hugo Southwell to injury just before half time with Richard Haughton moving to full back and the latter was almost caught out just after the break as he fumbled a chip through from Burns but recovered well to avoid any mishap.

Gloucester went on to dominate possession for the next few minutes with Wasps appearing to be hanging on in defence and Burns added a 48th minute penalty to extend the lead to 22-10.

However, the Wasps defence was finally breached again on 50 minutes as Henry Trinder chipped over the defensive line after a great turnover from the pack and won the race to touch down for the bonus point try.

Gloucester were now threatening to run amok and more slick hands looked to put Olly Morgan in at the corner. Again the call went to the TMO and again the call went Gloucester's way. Another difficult conversion attempt just eluded Burns but things were looking good at 32-10.

Morgan scored his second moments later as Trinder took a high cross kick magnificently before offloading to the supporting full back who coasted home. Burns converted and the party was well and truly underway at Kingsholm.

A flurry of replacements on both sides rather saw the fizz go out of the game but the Gloucester faithful had seen plenty of champagne rugby this afternoon and were in good spirits.

Wasps were spared further humiliation as for the second week running Charlie Sharples had a TMO decision go against him as he appeared to pounce as Richard Haughton willed a kick through to run dead. The makeshift Wasps full back produced a huge sigh of relief as the call went his way.

But that was the only thing that went in Wasps' favour in the second half as referee Greg Garner brought an end to proceedings and the Gloucester fans went off into the night full of the joys of Christmas.

JC