

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, JANUARY 28, 2012

KINGSHOLM – LV= CUP

GLOUCESTER TOO STRONG AS CARDIFF SUFFER THE BLUES

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 40 CARDIFF BLUES 3

Match Report by Duncan Wood

Despite a spirited effort from Cardiff, Gloucester were simply too strong in the end for the Blues, scoring five tries on their way to a 40 points to 3 LV= Cup win.

The win takes Gloucester to ten points from three games in the competition, level with Harlequins who have also played three matches and the Scarlets who have only played two.

So, technically, the chance of making the semi-finals for the fourth season in a row remains although Gloucester's destiny is not entirely in their own hands.

Today, however, was all about taking on the Blues and no-one in the home dressing room would have been giving the semi-finals even a second thought.

Two teams who were vastly changed from the line ups fielded in their respective Heineken Cup fixtures last weekend delivered an entertaining encounter but Gloucester just had too much in the locker.

Cardiff fought gamely. They only conceded one try until not long before half time although cracks were starting to appear as Ryan Mills slotted three penalties with the Blues' defence stretched to breaking point.

Tim Molenaar's comeback try gave Gloucester breathing space at half time but the first 20 minutes of the second half were slow indeed as the game didn't really get going after the break.

As has happened so often in the past though, James Simpson-Daniel provided the spark required as he crossed twice in quick succession to clinch the win and the bonus point.

The visitors actually made the better start as an impressive early line break led to an early penalty from Ben Blair who was making his comeback after a 15 month injury absence.

There was almost an immediate riposte as the Blues mishandled the restart and James Simpson-Daniel tried to power his way to the corner but his pass inside found opposition hands.

Simpson-Daniel was threatening to be a thorn in Cardiff's side as he popped up with ball in hand several times but Gloucester escaped when a speculative Fuimaono-Sapolu offload was picked off, Tom Voyce doing the emergency defensive work.

Voyce was then instrumental in Gloucester's first score. His long pass found Henry Trinder in space and the makeshift winger weaved in and out before finding Peter Buxton in support and the flanker just made the line. Mills converted for a 7-3 lead.

And the lead was soon extended to 10 points to three when Mills added a long-range penalty as Cardiff were penalized at the ruck area, although this was followed by the sad sight of Brett Deacon being stretchered off.

The former Leicester back row man had been waiting patiently for a first team opportunity and to last less than 20 minutes was a bitter blow for him.

It was fairly fragmented stuff from Gloucester at this point, not entirely unexpected given the number of changes to the team.

However, Andy Hazell was clearly enjoying being back in the thick of the action and his work at the breakdown led to Mills adding a second penalty on 25 minutes and making the score 13-3.

Gloucester then so very nearly scored a second try as Trinder caught a Lewis chip and was only halted inches short and Voyce actually made the corner but was called back for a forward pass.

It was a narrow escape for Cardiff but Mills soon added his third penalty of the afternoon as his pack destroyed a Blues scrum.

The pack were certainly getting a taste for it up front and muscular work from Buxton and then Knight set up Tim Molenaar who fought his way to the line for a popular try.

Gloucester were certainly good value for the 21-3 half time lead which was based on a clear superiority up front.

Peter Buxton and his men had mangled the Cardiff set piece on several occasions leaving the Blues continually on the back foot.

Bucko, in fact, was having a great time of it – punching above his weight in the breakdown but also revelling in several gallops with ball in hand.

The one fly in the ointment, of course, was the injury to Deacon but his team mates needed to take care of business first in order to dedicate a win to their fallen comrade.

The second half got off to a slow start with neither side really being able to gain the ascendancy and only a strong run from Matt Cox really threatening to lift the crowd with the game in something of a lull.

Worryingly, Gloucester lost a second man to injury as Henry Trinder departed the scene but his replacement, Ian Clark from the Academy, quickly caught the eye with the enthusiasm of his play.

The game really needed a spark as the hour mark came and went and it came from Simpson-Daniel who benefitted from more good work from the pack, pouncing on a loose ball and stepping his way to the line in his own inimitable way.

And it was Sinbad again for the bonus point on 67 minutes as Gloucester went blindsided from a set scrum, Nick Runciman linking with the winger and Sinbad doing the rest. Mills converted for 33-3.

Andy Hazell capped a fine performance by burrowing his way over from close range for the fifth try and Clark thought he'd scored on his debut but the referee spotted a forward pass as Gloucester started to turn on the style.

The unfortunate Blues, who didn't stop trying right up until the final whistle, were denied even a consolation score as Tom James couldn't reach a kick into the Gloucester in goal area before it ran dead.

However, it was certainly Gloucester's day and hopes of LV= Cup qualification remain alive.

JC