

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2012

MADEJSKI STADIUM – LV= CUP

HOMER PUTS THE BOOT INTO GLOUCESTER'S LV= CUP HOPES

LONDON IRISH 23 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 15

Match Report by Duncan Wood

A massively reshuffled Gloucester Rugby side gave it everything at the Madejski Stadium on Saturday afternoon but came up just short as six penalties from the boot of Tom Homer secured a 23-15 win for London Irish.

Homer clinically punished Gloucester whenever they transgressed as the Cherry and Whites outscored their hosts by two tries to one in what proved to be a losing cause.

It wasn't a classic, far from it. Neither team was anywhere near their best and Gloucester, as predicted before the game, struggled with their direction.

What wasn't in question, however, was the application and commitment. Gloucester were starved of possession for the first 20 minutes but simply refused to give in.

They fought back after the break and almost clawed their way back into the game on a couple of occasions only for indiscipline to allow Homer to ease Irish clear.

Bryan Redpath's side can take a lot of heart from the game however. They played with pride and, had a couple of chances not been wasted in the final quarter, even have sneaked an unlikely win.

But, the defence of the LV= Cup now comes to an end and everything is now focussed on the Aviva Premiership with a massive few weeks lying ahead.

The home side dominated possession for the first couple of minutes as Gloucester fell foul of referee Sean Davey and Irish full back Tom Homer kicked a 3rd minute penalty to open the scoring.

It was a tough opening for Gloucester who had barely touched the ball at this point and were soon opened up on the left flank with the spare man, hooker Brian Blaney, having enough strength to touch down in the corner.

Flanker Andy Hazell, who had twice received treatment already, left the pitch injured as the conversion was missed just to compound a difficult first ten minutes for the Cherry and Whites.

The lead quickly became 11-0 as Homer added his second penalty with Gloucester conceding a penalty at a set scrum and his third, from halfway, made it 14-0 on 17 minutes.

Gloucester finally got a decision as the first quarter drew to a close but the lack of a front-line kicker betrayed them as the kick to the corner failed to find touch and allowed Irish to clear.

Very little was going Gloucester's way at this stage and two missed lineouts in a row almost allowed the Exiles to benefit but for some heroic last-ditch defence saving the day.

There was no lack of commitment from Gloucester and they looked reasonably comfortable defending from first phase possession in particular.

However, an understandable lack of cohesion in attack given all the new faces meant that they weren't hurting Irish offensively.

Dave Lewis came closest with a neat break down the 5 metre channel but Sailosi Tagicakibau won the chase to touch down Lewis' grubber kick into the in-goal area.

Half time arrived with precious little else to cheer for hardy supporters of both sides who were braving the Madejski cold.

It was subdued in the stands and likewise on the pitch. The home side were dominating possession and territory but weren't able to do much with it whereas Gloucester just couldn't get into the game.

To their credit, Gloucester came out and started positively, pinning the home side back in their own 22 before Tindall opened Gloucester's account with a penalty.

Irish came back strongly but were stunned as Gloucester turned the ball over in their own 22. Buxton found Ian Clark who simply burned off the cover to score from 90 metres. Tindall converted to make it 14-10.

Homer duly restored a little sanity and settled home nerves a little with his fourth and fifth penalties of the afternoon to stretch the lead to 20-10 as Gloucester were guilty of a couple of ruck offences.

The Cherry and Whites continued to ask questions though and stunned the sparse crowd as Fuimaono-Sapolu sprung Simpson-Daniel who put Clark into the left-hand corner for his second try.

Tim Molenaar though deserves real praise for his part in the build-up as he scooped up a loose ball before making good ground.

There was now a hint of tension amongst the home crowd especially when Matt Cox sprinted 40 metres down the right flank although nothing came of the attack.

Gloucester really gave it a go as time started to become a factor, but Homer's sixth penalty on 75 minutes as Irish took a pragmatic approach to securing the win, pretty much settled the outcome.

Still the towel wasn't thrown in and Gloucester spent the final few minutes looking for what may have been a consolation score.

It didn't come and the defence of the LV= Cup came to a brave end.

JC