

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2012

THE RECREATION GROUND – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

GLOUCESTER DOG OUT VITAL WIN AT MUDDY REC

BATH RUGBY 11 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 14

The Recreation Ground may have been sodden from the off but that didn't stop sparks flying as Gloucester battled their way to a 14-11 Aviva Premiership win over Bath on Saturday afternoon.

It was a ferocious encounter throughout. There was a near 30 man brawl in the first three minutes and that set the tone for a fractious 80 minutes.

The Cherry and Whites just came out on top but it could, and maybe should, have been a lot easier as several first half chances were wasted.

However, Gloucester kept at it in dogged fashion and didn't let their heads drop even when they were pegged back to 11 points apiece midway through the second half and influential playmaker Freddie Burns limped off with cramp.

No, the forwards rolled up their sleeves and just kept fighting on with a penalty opportunity eventually created for young Ryan Mills who showed nerves of still to bisect the posts and secure the win.

Every player deserves plaudits for the way they performed but, putting in possibly his biggest shift of the season, was prop Nick Wood.

Scrummaging as powerfully as ever, the loose head also managed to score Gloucester's try, make a couple of rampaging runs in the loose and also track down Bath scrum half Michael Claassens when the South African made a dangerous break. He was deservedly named Man of the Match by Sky.

In the content of the Aviva Premiership season, it's a huge win. With London Irish and Sale Sharks losing, Gloucester move up to fifth in the table and a little bit closer to being in control of their own destiny.

The weather forecasters had confidently predicted that the inclement weather would blow through by 2pm but the rain was still coming down heavily as the game kicked off.

The sight of the groundsmen spiking the pitch to get rid of standing water was not a promising one and the home supporters were somewhat slower to take their seats in the Novia Stand than usual.

Gloucester kicked off playing towards the Teachers Stand which meant Bath had a stiff breeze in their face and the wind created early confusion in the home ranks as Woodburn and Claassens both allowed a high kick to bounce but got away with it.

But the game kicked off properly just three minutes in as a massive brawl started on the Gloucester 22 with plenty of players involved from both teams. Wayne Barnes had real problems establishing order.

After lengthy consultation with his assistants, Barnes duly sinbinned Jim Hamilton and Ryan Caldwell and awarded Gloucester a penalty.

Understandably both teams produced plenty of handling errors in the opening exchanges and the kickers were quickly putting boot to ball to test the back threes.

However, Bath put together the first real attacking move of note as Lee Mears rolled a grubber kick in behind Charlie Sharples who didn't seem to see Tom Biggs coming up on the blindside.

The Bath wing kicked on, shrugged off an attempted challenge and won the chase to the ball to open the scoring. Barkley couldn't convert but Bath had drawn first blood.

Freddie Burns had mostly been putting the ball into the air but, out of the blue, on 17 minutes opened up the home defence.

His show and go took him through a gap and his centres were on his shoulder. Tindall almost made the line but Gloucester were patient and Simpson-Daniel floated a long pass for Nick Wood to battle his way into the corner to level the scores.

Gloucester's front row then very nearly created a second as Harden burst from a rolling maul and Wood took it on to within a few metres but a knock on from the support ended the danger.

It had been a good few minutes for Gloucester and they almost took the lead on 25 minutes as Bath's scrum buckled on their own 22 but Burns missed an easy penalty.

Burns showed no ill effects as his penalty from hand put Gloucester deep into the Bath 22 but Akapusi Qera couldn't capitalise as he lost the ball forward near the line with two men unmarked outside him.

Referee Barnes was playing advantage, however, and Burns kicked the penalty for an 8-5 lead whereas Barkley missed a sitter two minutes later as Bath sought to hit straight back.

Fantastic work from Nick Wood, chasing back, tackling and winning a penalty then earned Burns another kick at goal as half time approached but the attempt was a whisker wide.

However, he made no mistake with no time left on the clock as Tom Biggs took Tom Savage high and drilled the ball through the posts from distance.

An 11-5 half time lead was a useful one for Gloucester but it could have been better in all honesty.

A couple of try-scoring chances had been butchered and a couple of penalties missed that Freddie Burns would have backed himself to get.

However, the signs were promising. Burns was asking all sorts of questions of the Bath defence at fly half and the Gloucester pack was certainly getting the better of their Bath counterparts.

A second half comeback was bound to come but the Cherry and Whites needed to carry on in the same way as they had done in the first half.

It was a tentative opening to the second period although one catch and drive from Gloucester threatened to hurt the home side but came to nothing as the defence regrouped.

Bath did eventually open up the Gloucester midfield as Olly Woodburn came in off his wing and burst through a hole. Gloucester got back and defended their line valiantly but at the expense of a Barkley penalty.

There was a further setback for Gloucester as Freddie Burns hobbled off to be replaced by Ryan Mills.

The home team's tails were up and a botched Gloucester lineout led to the midfield being caught offside. Tom Heathcote stepped up as Barkley had been receiving treatment and levelled the scores on the hour.

Sensing a momentum change, Gloucester dug deep and sterling work from the pack led to Bath failing to roll away from the tackle area. Mills kept his cool to slot the penalty.

The final 15 minutes weren't pretty. Gloucester had the upper hand but couldn't quite eke out a score that would have killed off Bath.

Instead, they tried to run out the clock but conceded a last second penalty which Bath drilled into the Gloucester 22 only to knock on at the lineout.

Wayne Barnes blew the whistle and a small corner of the Rec, clad in Cherry and White, erupted in joy!