

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, AUGUST 18, 2012

KINGSHOLM – FRIENDLY

GLOUCESTER OFF AND RUNNING WITH HARD FOUGHT BLUES WIN

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 20 CARDIFF BLUES 8

Match Report By Duncan Wood

Gloucester Rugby clinched their first win of their pre-season with a battling 20 points to 8 victory over the Cardiff Blues at a muggy Kingsholm on Saturday afternoon.

The Blues were a worthy opponent on an afternoon when Gloucester probably could and should have won more easily.

Good scoring opportunities were created in both halves but frittered away due to handling mistakes and wrong decisions.

But credit has to go to the visitors, a young squad who fielded a different XV in each half, who defended stoutly throughout.

Eventually, however, as the game clock ticked by, the Cherry and Whites established a superiority up front and this proved crucial as Gloucester's scrummaging came out on top both in attack and in defence.

A penalty try a few minutes from time settled the contest and see Gloucester prepare for next weeks' visit from the Doncaster Knights in good heart but with plenty still to work on.

Conditions were appropriately perfect on an occasion which celebrated the sterling service of two Gloucester stalwarts, Alex Brown and Nick Wood, and Kingsholm buzzed with anticipation and expectation.

The Blues had the first scoring chance though as Gloucester were caught offside in midfield but Ceri Sweeney's attempt rapped the post and rebounded clear.

It was a lively opening but neither side could really gain the upper hand. Handling errors halted a couple of promising Gloucester moves and there was a lengthy stoppage for treatment to Mike Tindall who, thankfully, was able to carry on.

Eventually, Gloucester drew first blood as the pack forced a penalty from a Cardiff put in and Billy Twelvetrees slotted the penalty.

And it was Twelvetrees who had the crowd on their feet on 22 minutes when, with seemingly nothing on, he stepped two men and accelerated to the line for a fine solo score which he duly converted himself for a 10-0 lead.

Tindall meanwhile showed all his experience to contribute a key moment in defence after a break from wing Tom Williams, the former England centre snaffling an ambitious inside pass to save his side.

It had been a good spell for the visitors but Gloucester were looking dangerous in the back line with Robson only halted by a despairing tap tackle and a scything break from Trinder only halted by the centre losing his feet.

Half time came with no further score as Gloucester could reflect on a deserved advantage at the break.

Cardiff were providing a robust opposition and caused the occasional nervy moment when in possession but it was the Cherry and Whites who were oozing menace with ball in hand.

Had it not been for some frustrating handling errors and some despairing work in defence by the Blues, the margin could have been far wider.

Akapusi Qera was a half time introduction and was quickly in the thick of the action, carrying powerfully into contact, but Gloucester were indebted to some great work in defence by Ian Clark to keep their line intact.

However, Cardiff wouldn't let Gloucester out of their 22 and a penalty was eventually conceded which saw Gareth Davies reduce the gap to 10-3 after 48 minutes.

Gloucester responded strongly and very nearly breached the Cardiff line again. However, they were a little too cute with their offloading and had to settle for a second Twelvetrees penalty.

The Blues still wouldn't go away and some neat offloading out of the tackle saw Andy Kyriacou burst into the 22 and find wing Harry Robinson in support for the Blues' first try to make it a 13-8 game with 20 minutes to play.

Despite it being a pre-season friendly, it was a time for cool heads to try and close out the win and Gloucester duly narrowed the game plan a touch and camped in the Blues 22.

A number of 5 metre scrums softened up the Cardiff pack and Qera was held up over the line before referee Pearce lost patience and awarded the penalty try which was easily converted by Twelvetrees.

With a 20 points to 8 lead and just seven minutes to play, Gloucester looked home and try but the Blues still had something in the tank and laid siege to the Gloucester line.

However, the Blues pack was scrummaging as though on roller skates by now and, despite forcing a 5m metre attacking scrum, were shunted off their own ball to end any hint of an unlikely comeback.

Gloucester Rugby Lineups

Martyn Thomas; Charlie Sharples, Henry Trinder, Mike Tindall, Ian Clark; Billy Twelvetrees, Dan Robson; Nick Wood, Tommaso d'Apice, Rupert Harden; Will James, Alex Brown (capt.); Matt Cox, Andy Hazell, Ben Morgan

Replacements:

Koree Britton (for d'Apice, HT), Dan Murphy (for Wood, 58 mins), Shaun Knight (for Harden, 51 mins), Tom Savage (for Brown, 51 mins), Sione Kalamafoni (for Morgan, 51 mins), Akapusi Qera (for Hazell, HT), Dave Lewis (for Robson, 51 mins), Peter Buxton (for James, 78 mins), Tim Taylor, Tim Molenaar, Drew Locke (for Trinder, 74 mins), Rob Cook (for Thomas, 56 mins), Darren Dawidiuk

Cardiff Blues Lineups

First half

Dan Fish, Harry Robinson, Owen Williams, Rhys Patchell, Tom Williams; Ceri Sweeney, Lewis Jones; Nathan Trevett, Rhys Williams, Scott Andrews; Robin Copeland, James Down; Macauley Cook (capt), Josh Navidi, Luke Hamilton

Second half

Tom Williams; Harry Robinson, Gavin Evans (capt), Cory Allen, Owen Williams; Gareth Davies, Robert Lewis; Tom Davies, Andy Kyriacou, Taufao Filise; Robin Copeland, James Down; Rory Watts-Jones, Thomas Young, Andries Pretorious