

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2012

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

GLOUCESTER POWER THEIR WAY TO VICTORY OVER SALE SHARKS

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Based on a powerful forward effort, Gloucester battled their way to a comprehensive 29-3 win over Sale Sharks in the Aviva Premiership on Saturday afternoon. 19 points from Freddie Burns paved the way.

Gloucester were in total control throughout, accumulating points when they were offered in the first half before stretching away in the final stages.

It wasn't a classic. The going was good to soft following heavy rain recently, and the visitors had clearly come to town looking to spoil rather than create.

What followed though was a very professional performance from Gloucester, with the forwards, pretty much written off by pundits prior to the season, taking the game by the scruff of the neck.

They forced penalties galore out of their Sale counterparts. Had so many of them not been awarded in the middle third of the pitch, yellow cards may have followed.

But Freddie Burns is in such excellent kicking form at the moment, the penalties were translated into points and Sale were never really in the game.

There was a bit of a lull in the second half as both sides sought to gain the upper hand and pretty much negated each other.

However, the final quarter saw Gloucester find another gear and it came as no surprise when Akapusi Qera crossed for the first try, before the efforts of the pack were finally rewarded with a penalty try.

The win moves Gloucester into third place in the Aviva Premiership table, level on points with Saracens who, of course, they meet next weekend.

Sale's search for a second win of the season goes on. They were strangely muted today, probably shackled by Gloucester's dominance. A tough winter awaits.

The predicted rain was still holding off as kick off time approached. Gloucester were forced into a late change as Peter Buxton failed a fitness test and was replaced by Ross Moriarty.

It was a solid start from the Cherry and Whites. Twelvetrees made good ground with his first carry. The forwards carried on the powerful work, forcing Sale to concede a penalty and Freddie Burns made it 3-0 after five minutes.

And Burns doubled the lead on 11 minutes with his second penalty, as Sale failed to roll away from the tackle area with Gloucester dominating the physical exchanges.

The Gloucester scrum, in particular, was looking in good nick and forced another penalty on 20 minutes. It wasn't easy, but Burns slotted it with ease and added another long range effort two minutes later for a 12-0 lead.

The Sharks were conceding penalty after penalty, but no yellow cards were being brandished. Burns didn't care as he kicked his fifth penalty on 25 minutes to extend the lead.

Gloucester were still trying to be ambitious, and Burns turned down a kickable effort on the half hour in favour of a cross kick to Sharples. However, the bounce was unkind and the winger closed down.

Sale did eventually get some territory and boldly opted to kick for the corner. However, the Gloucester defence was up to the task, with a huge hit from Kalamafoni forcing a knock-on and Cowan completing the clearance.

However, Sale did get some points on 38 minutes, when Mike Tindall failed to roll away from the tackle area quickly enough for the liking of referee Luke Pearce and Danny Cipriani kicked the penalty.

So far, so good for Gloucester, but Sale were hanging in there and frustrating Nigel Davies' side with their spoiling tactics.

The Cherry and Whites clearly had the winning of the game, but they were going to have to remain patient and not try to force things.

The Sharks did look lively after the resumption, but Gloucester's forwards were soon back at their strong ball carrying best. However, the visitors' defence was coping well.

And Sam Tuitupou gave the home crowd a scare with a powerful dart into the 22, which deserved better than the knock on that followed. It was a timely warning that the game was far from won.

A lengthy stoppage followed as Huia Edmonds received treatment near the Gloucester line, and the Australian hooker was sadly stretchered off.

It was a pretty ugly game at this point to be fair. Lots of effort but little sparkle. The Kingsholm crowd sensed they were needed and duly got behind their team in noisy style as the hour mark came and went.

Skipper Jim Hamilton responded with a key scrag on Dwayne Peel, won the penalty, and Gloucester kicked to the corner.

They remained patient, keeping it tight in the forwards, and eventually a gap opened up for Akapusi Qera, who needed no second invitation. Burns added the conversion for 22-3. Gloucester had some daylight at last.

The Gloucester forwards were now well and truly on top. A couple of catch and drive chances went begging, but a 5 metre scrum resulted in a well-deserved penalty try.

It was a belated reward for the herculean endeavours of the Gloucester forwards. They're getting better and better as the season progresses which is good news with the winter weather drawing in.

All in all, a comprehensive and dominant display from Gloucester, who stayed focused on a day when emotions could have run riot.

They'll now move on to Vicarage Road looking to cement a top four place with spirits high in the camp.

JC