

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2013

KINGSHOLM – LV= CUP

**LV= CUP CAMPAIGN ENDS WITH DISAPPOINTING HOME DEFEAT
TO BATH**

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 5 BATH RUGBY 32

Gloucester hadn't lost to Bath at home since February 2006, but the men from the Rec left Kingsholm triumphant on Saturday afternoon with a 32-5 win in their pockets.

The final score-line was emphatic, and perhaps flattered the visitors a little – after 65 minutes, Gloucester were still in the game at 13-5 down. However, the final 15 minutes saw the visitors run away with the game. Bath scored three tries, the final two courtesy of some weak tackling, and stretched away from the Cherry and Whites.

Perhaps the efforts of the first half took their toll in that final quarter. The teams turned around locked together at 5 points apiece, and it seemed as though Gloucester had weathered the storm.

Indeed, Charlie Sharples very nearly scored just before half time, and Lua Lokotui just afterwards. Things may have panned out very differently had they crossed the whitewash.

But, in the cold light of day, Gloucester were second best. They went into half time on even terms, mainly because of their sheer doggedness. Bath could, and perhaps should, have had a decent lead.

Literally everything was against the Cherry and Whites in the first 40 minutes – the elements, two yellow cards, virtually no possession and therefore no territory and the thin end of the wedge in terms of the refereeing.

That they were still on level terms gave real hope for the second half, but, despite a promising opening, it wasn't meant to be.

Gloucester can point to any number of reasons for defeat. However, they were well below par, well beaten and will expect to bounce back next weekend at Northampton.

The visitors were on the front foot from the off, and had the first attacking opportunity when Andy Hazell was penalised for a late hit on Stephen Donald.

Bath went for the corner, and were held out twice illegally by Gloucester. However, the defensive effort was superb and won a penalty at the third time of asking to relieve the pressure.

Bath, playing with a strong wind behind them, looked the sharper in the opening stages. Bath's offloading game looked in good nick and Gloucester were dealt a blow when Andy Hazell was yellow carded on 10 minutes.

The pressure was on, and it came as no real surprise when an overlap was created on the right and Olly Woodburn crossed untouched. Donald dragged his conversion wide of the left upright but Bath had the early lead.

Gloucester responded well as Sione Kalamafoni nicked a Bath lineout in their own 22, but good field position led, frustratingly, only to a knock on.

It was pretty much all Bath at this point. Gloucester's set piece wasn't clicking, and the Cherry and Whites weren't impressing referee Davies who was penalising them frequently.

This was typified on 21 minutes, just after Hazell returned to the action, when Tom Savage was sinbinned for driving through at the lineout. The Shed were less than impressed . . .

Gloucester's defence was manful as they kept wave after wave of attack at bay, and then very nearly struck from deep. Charlie Sharples latched onto a kick downfield from Shane Monahan but was denied by great defence by Horacio Agulla.

Given everything that had gone before, it was hugely impressive that Gloucester got back on terms as half time approached.

An attack down the right led to a penalty and Ryan Mills worked the corner. The pack executed a superb catch and drive, and Huia Edmonds touched down for his first try for the club. The Shed was happier!

With renewed self-belief, Gloucester then almost pounced again. Another counter attack from deep saw Rob Cook back himself and dummy his way through a gap, only to be hauled down by Olly Woodburn.

Amazingly, as referee Davies blew for half time, this was still in the balance. Gloucester had overcome playing into a strong wind, virtually no territory or possession and hadn't been on the same wavelength as the referee, hence the two yellow cards.

However, the resilience and team spirit that has typified this season was present by the bucket load. The defence was immense and, when Gloucester did get some ball, they looked dangerous.

The second half would be hugely interesting. If Gloucester could use the elements wisely and improve their discipline, this game was still there to be won despite everything.

The second half started brightly. Tindall produced a superb clearance kick and the pack backed it up with a strong catch and drive. Lua Lokotui broke for the line but was just short and held on in the tackle.

Bath then stunned the crowd with a well worked try. Clean lineout ball on halfway saw the ball shipped down the back line, and Nick Abendanon finished off the move as a three on two was created and expertly exploited.

Bath were now keeping the ball in hand more as they played into the wind, and looked a dangerous animal. But it was the boot of Vesty that extended the lead to 13-5 with a 62nd minute penalty.

Bath were making no attempt to kick for territory, wisely in the circumstances, and their ability with ball in hand made them a potent force, even from deep.

Mat Gilbert crashed over from close range to open up an emphatic lead, and that was that in terms of a contest.

Semesa Rokoduguni and Stephen Donald cantered through some poor tackling to put the icing on the cake from a Bath point of view, and there was the rare sight of the Gloucester faithful leaving early.

Monday's analysis one will be a painful one for Gloucester. There is plenty to work on ahead of the return to Premiership action next Saturday at Franklin's Gardens.

JC