

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, AUGUST 24, 2013

THOMOND PARK – FRIENDLY

PLUCKY GLOUCESTER SLIP UP IN SODDEN MUNSTER

MUNSTER RUGBY 28 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 17

Match Report By Duncan Wood

Gloucester gave it everything at a rain sodden Thomond Park on Saturday evening, matching up well against Munster, but were ultimately edged out 28-17.

It was a game that Nigel Davies' side didn't disgrace themselves in. They were competitive in most areas of the game. Defence and scrum were particularly impressive and heads never dropped.

However, a try conceded on the stroke of half time and one just after clawing themselves back into the game at 14-10 were body blows.

Munster deserved the win, of that there can be little doubt, but there were plenty of positives for the Gloucester coaching staff to ponder on.

Any possibility of this fixture being viewed as a dress rehearsal for the season's Heineken Cup encounters, were offset by the respective team selections, with many internationals on both sides not featuring.

As kick off time approached, the prospects of an open, entertaining game were also not helped by the rainy conditions. Well before 5pm, the floodlights were on.

It wasn't a massive crowd at Thomond Park by any means, but they got behind the home side in style in the opening stages as both teams settled their way into the game.

Early indiscipline saw Munster have the first chance of points. A catch and drive was halted just short, before winger John Murphy was denied a try as Ian Keatley's neat inside pass was ruled to be forward.

Gloucester were under real pressure, hardly able to touch the ball and only superb last ditch defence by Charlie Sharples denied Andrew Conway after a great run and offload by Casey Laulala.

Amazingly, Gloucester then scored from their first possession in the home half. Cowan drilled a grubber down the blindside, and full back Denis Hurley fumbled it, presenting the scrum half with an easy score.

However, Cowan then had a kick charged down to pile the pressure back on Gloucester. Keatley spotted a mismatch on the right and floated a cross kick for Conway to score. Keatley's conversion made it 7-5 after 21 minutes.

The rain continued to fall. If anything, it got heavier. Gloucester were giving it as good as they got, but the Munster playmakers were getting it spot on as they drove Nigel Davies' side back with a series of low kicks.

Jonny Bentley was more reliant on the up and under to test the Munster back three, but they were coping well in the conditions as the half hour mark came and went.

It looked as though Gloucester were going to make into half time with their line intact, but Munster then unleashed a fine backs move for try number two.

John Murphy came in off his wing to create the extra man in midfield, and Ivan Dineed was through to send Casey Laulala into the Gloucester 22. Laulala was caught but managed to offload to Hurley for the try. Keatley added the extras.

The late try was a blow after a spirited effort in the first half. As the cliché goes, the conditions were a great leveller but Gloucester were acquitting themselves well.

They'd been under some pressure in defence, but held up well in the circumstances. The real challenge was proving to be securing decent possession.

On several occasions, the 50/50 calls seemed to go the way of the home side and this ensured that Munster had the lion's share of the ball. That trend would have to be reversed in the second half if Gloucester were to get back on terms.

And the second half started well. Jonny Bentley went blindside and showed the trickery with ball in hand that he's capable of. He found Steph Reynolds who bamboozled his man to score in the corner to get Gloucester back into it at 14-10.

However, Gloucester were promptly caught cold by a quickly taken lineout. The lineout looked to be set but play was allowed to carry on. James Coughlan carried powerfully into the 22, before quick ball saw JJ Hanrahan scamper under the posts. 21-10 to the home side.

The response was good, Britton and Kalamafoni both carrying powerfully. But it was a turnover from Mike Tindall that created a half chance, Ryan Mills' grubber for Steph Reynolds just rolling dead.

However, the next score came for the home team as flanker CJ Stander burrowed his way over from close range for their fourth try of the evening. Hanrahan converted for 28-10.

With the game heading into the final quarter, replacements were now being made on both sides and the continuity of the game understandably suffered as a result.

Gloucester continued to battle in all aspects of the game as they sought to finish on a positive note and that persistence was rewarded on 74 minutes with a close range try from Koree Britton. Billy Burns converted.

Gloucester were ambitious right to the very end, but a further score eluded them as the game concluded amidst a sea of handling errors.

Only a double header at Kingsholm against Plymouth Albion and Scarlets now lie ahead of Gloucester before the Aviva Premiership season itself kicks off against Sale on September 7th.

Munster Rugby Line-ups'

Denis Hurley; Andrew Conway, Casey Laulala, Ivan Dineen, Johnne Murphy; Ian Keatley, Duncan Williams; James Cronin, Mike Sherry, John Ryan; Donnacha O'Callaghan, Billy Holland; CJ Stander, Niall Ronan, James Coughlan

Replacements:

Niall Scannell, Duncan Casey, Alan Cotter, Stephen Archer, Paddy Ryan, Ian Nagle, Dave Foley, Danny Kenny, Willie Ryan, Shane Buckley, Barry O'Mahony, Cathal Sheridan, Gerry Hurley, JJ Hanrahan, Johnny Holland, Cian Bohane, Mike Kelleher, Niall Kenneally, Ronan O'Mahony

Gloucester Rugby Line-ups

Steph Reynolds; Charlie Sharples, Tim Molenaar, Ryan Mills, James Simpson-Daniel; Jonny Bentley, Jimmy Cowan; Dan Murphy, Dan George, Yann Thomas; Elliott Stooke, Will James; Matt Cox, Andy Hazell (capt), Gareth Evans

Replacements:

James Gibbons, Koree Britton, Rupert Harden, Lua Lokotui, Tom Savage, Sione Kalamafoni, Dan Robson, Billy Burns, Mike Tindall, Drew Cheshire