

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2013

KINGSHOLM – FRIENDLY

GLOUCESTER JUST TOO STRONG FOR SPIRITED
AND AMBITIOUS JAPAN

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 40 JAPAN XVKO 5

Match Report By Duncan Wood

Charlie Sharples may have been a late call up to the Gloucester line up to face Japan, but he made the most of the opportunity, scoring a hat-trick as the Cherry and Whites defeated the Cherry Blossoms by 40 points to 5.

After a shaky start, Gloucester Rugby regained some much-needed pride and confidence as they ran in six tries against a Japanese side that fought doggedly from beginning to end.

Credit to the tourists, they gave it a real go. Their ambition and energy levels were phenomenal and it even appeared as though the home crowd were willing them to score a consolation try before the final whistle.

It made life far from easy for Gloucester, but the Cherry and Whites can take heart from the fact that this wasn't a walkover, this was a hard-fought encounter against a spirited opponent.

If you were being hyper critical, you might argue that Gloucester could have kicked on in the second half having led 26-5 at half time.

That they couldn't do so was very much down to the terrific attitude of the Japan side, for whom scrum half Atsushi Hiwasa was a real livewire.

The game also lost some of its momentum after the break, as a few breaks for injuries and multiple substitutions took their toll.

But, overall, it was an entertaining evening of rugby and both teams more than played their part.

Gloucester knew they were in for a game right from the very first minute. Japan turned over ruck ball deep in the home 22, stayed patient and eventually worked an overlap for flanker Justin Ives to score untouched. Kingsholm was slightly stunned to say the least.

Injury was then added to insult as second row James Hudson was led off the field of play to be replaced by Ross Moriarty.

It had been a bright opening for the visitors, but Gloucester hit back strongly with some powerful ball-carrying from the pack. A rolling maul threatened while Jimmy Cowan was held up over the line.

The Cherry and Whites kept it tight, and continued to hammer away via the forwards. Japan defended gamely, but were eventually undone by some sleight of hand from James Simpson-Daniel, his slick inside pass putting Charlie Sharples in for a fine score.

It was quickly followed by a sensational second try; real end to end stuff. Ryan Mills was intercepted on halfway, but Tamura didn't have the legs and was hauled down superbly by Matt Cox who chased back.

Jonny May countered, and Gloucester spread the ball wide. Andy Hazell accelerated through a gap and looked set to score, but was felled by a last ditch tap tackle. However, his offload found Rob Cook who put Simpson-Daniel under the posts. Cook converted for 12-5.

The third wasn't far behind. Jimmy Cowan made a telling break from a scrum in Gloucester territory, drew the final man and sent Charlie Sharples flying down the wing for his second. Cook converted beautifully.

If Japan were rocked, they certainly didn't show it. Offloading quickly out of the tackle, they stretched Gloucester who were indebted to some fine defensive work from Mike Tindall in particular.

Despite the Japanese resistance, it was Gloucester who struck next and, again, the softening up work took place up front. The pack set up great field position before Ryan Mills floated a sublime chip for Sharples to jump, catch and complete his hat trick. Cook added a touchline conversion for 26-5 at half time.

After the rocky start, Gloucester had imposed themselves on the game. It had taken a while to finally prise open the Japanese defence, but some quality scores had followed.

The visitors started the second half ambitiously, although Sharples very nearly had a fourth as he came through a ruck to hack ahead and re-gather, only for a last ditch tap tackle to trip him up.

The game looked set to open up for a while, as the Gloucester wingers saw plenty of ball. However, the next action of note was a yellow card for Japan flanker, Horie, as a Gloucester maul was pulled down near the Japan line.

Frustratingly, the momentum of the encounter was lost somewhat as the physio's from both sides had to make frequent visits to the field of play, and replacements were frequently used.

It wasn't until the 64th minute that the second half deadlock was broken. James Simpson-Daniel picked off an errant Japanese pass, and could probably have run it home himself, but unselfishly passed to Steph Reynolds for the score.

The scoring was then rounded off by Matt Cox, who popped up on the right wing, showed quick feet and great strength and powered his way home for the sixth and final try. Cook converted both.

The visitors were far from disheartened and continued to move the ball around slickly as they sought a consolation score. On a couple of occasions they came close, but just couldn't cross the whitewash in the face of some determined Gloucester defence.

Japan may have lost on the evening, but they'll have won a lot of friends in the Gloucester area.

Gloucester Rugby Lineups

Rob Cook; Charlie Sharples, Jonny May, Mike Tindall, James Simpson-Daniel; Ryan Mills, Jimmy Cowan; Yann Thomas, Darren Dawidiuk, Rupert Harden; Elliott Stooke, James Hudson; Tom Savage (capt), Andy Hazell, Matt Cox

Replacements:

Koree Britton, James Gibbons, Shaun Knight, Lewis Ludlow, Ross Moriarty, Dan Robson, Billy Burns, Steph Reynolds

Japan XV Lineups

Yoshikazu Fujita (Waseda University); Akihito Yamada (Panasonic Wild Knights), Seeichi Shimomura (Panasonic Wild Knights), Yasuki Hayashi (Panasonic Wild Knights), Yuta Imamura (Kobe Steel Kobelco Steelers); Yu Tamura (NEC Green Rockets), Atsushi Hiwasa (Suntory Sungoliath); Yusuke Nagae (Ricoh Black Rams), Yusuke Aoki (Suntory Sungoliath), Hiroshi Yamashita (Kobe Steel Kobelco Steelers); Shinya Makabe (Suntory Sungoliath), Shoji Ito (Kobe Steel Kobelco Steelers); Justin Ives (Canon Eagles), Kyusoke Horie (Yamaha Jubilo), Takashi Kikutani (Toyota Verblitz)

Replacements:

Shota Horie (Panasonic Wild Knights), Hisateru Hirashima (Kobe Steel Kobelco Steelers), Takuma Asahara (Toshiba Brave Lupus), Hitoshi Ono (Toshiba Brave Lupus), Michael Broadhurst (Ricoh Black Rams), Kosei Ono (Suntory Sungoliath), Kotara Matsushima (Natal Sharks), Kirlyong So (Yamaha Jubilo)