

GLoucester Rugby

FRIDAY, AUGUST 18, 2017

ST. MARY'S RFC DUBLIN – PRE-SEASON FRIENDLY

**GLOUCESTER SLIP TO PRE-SEASON DEFEAT AGAINST SLICK
LEINSTER OUTFIT**

LEINSTER RUGBY 50 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 14

Match Report By Duncan Wood

There were some promising moments from Gloucester in Dublin on Friday evening, but not enough of them as a well-drilled Leinster outfit showed a clinical edge, exploiting every scoring opportunity on their way to a 50-14 victory.

This encounter was always going to be a tough one for the Cherry and Whites who flew straight into Dublin from Portugal where they had spent the previous few days on a preseason training camp.

Their hosts had already started their preseason campaign, and at times it showed. While Gloucester were looking to blow away some cobwebs and try some different combinations, Leinster were already that little bit further down the line in terms of their preparations.

Head Coach Johan Ackermann was honest in his assessment when he spoke after the game, pointing out the set-piece and breakdown as areas where improvement is required, but also took time to praise the Academy players who acquitted themselves well on the night.

The first half in particular was reasonably close and hard-fought, with a couple of key moments and decisions going the way of the home side which went a long way towards determining the 19-7 half-time score-line.

Gloucester obviously made wholesale changes at half-time while Leinster kept faith with their starting line-up which featured plenty of international experience in the form of the Kearney brothers, Isa Nacewa, Jamison Gibson-Park and Scott Fardy.

And, ultimately, Leinster's strength and greater experience told with the score-line taking a slightly lopsided look as the home side took advantage of errors from Gloucester as the Cherry and Whites tried in vain to run the ball from deep in a bid to get something from the game.

Nothing is won or lost in preseason as they say. Gloucester came through relatively unscathed in terms of injury with Charlie Sharples the only player forced to leave the field of play, a tweak to the hamstring the initial diagnosis.

More players will return next week as the Cherry and Whites look to step things up on Sharples' testimonial night with the real action starting the week after, at home to Exeter.

Leinster made a flying start on the evening, reclaiming the kick-off and patiently probing for an opening. The key break came from Scott Fardy, who made good ground into the 22 but it was Isa Nacewa who finished the move off for a 5-0 lead.

The Cherry and Whites attempted to hit back immediately and, with Heinz and Williams pulling the strings, moved dangerously into the home 22 only for Leinster to unleash some good spoiling work at the breakdown and quash the threat.

Having soaked up some pressure, Leinster showed their clinical edge by moving downfield and scoring their second. Nacewa made a powerful break in midfield, before Rob Kearney cut a good angle and found hooker Bryan Byrne with the inside pass. Namesake Ross added the extras.

There was no shortage of application from Gloucester as the first quarter reached its conclusion, but there was some inevitable preseason rustiness with a lack of precision at set-piece and breakdown hindering the efforts.

But Gloucester finally got some reward for their efforts on 24 minutes, Willi Heinz taking a quick tap penalty before linking with Henry Purdy who ghosted outside his man to touch down. Owen Williams added an excellent conversion for 12-7.

A good spell followed for Gloucester, but a couple of key 50-50 calls went Leinster's way and the home team took full advantage. Gloucester's defence was actually pretty solid, but Leinster's ball retention was better and Max Deegan eventually powered over from close range with Byrne converting for 19-7.

The Cherry and Whites then had to dig deep to defend their own line as a turnover saw them pinned back deep in their own 22, but some robust tackling from Halaifonua followed by a superb clearance from Owen Williams cleared the danger as the whistle blew for half-time.

Despite the score-line, it had been a solid effort from Gloucester who were inevitably ring-rusty against a strong opponent who had kicked off their own preseason against Perpignan last weekend.

Despite not having much possession to work with, Owen Williams had kicked beautifully and credit to a young back row trio who had acquitted themselves well. There were some inaccuracies but this was to be expected at this juncture.

As expected, Gloucester came out for the second half with a new look XV, but Billy Twelvetrees stayed on and lined up at full-back, while Henry Walker continued at hooker and Freddie Clarke at number eight.

Clarke showed up well in the opening exchanges, carrying powerfully off the base of the scrum and Andrew Symons was hungry for work, coming in off his wing to carry strongly into midfield as Gloucester competed well despite now playing into the breeze.

However, Leinster continued to get the benefit of more of the refereeing decisions, with Gloucester's scrum now starting to creak a bit and Ross Byrne extended the lead to 22-7 with a 56th minute penalty.

And Leinster's growing superiority up front told on the hour mark. A scrum penalty was followed by a well-drilled catch and drive, before the ball was moved wide where replacement full-back Jordan Larmour jinked over. Byrne converted for 29-7.

Bad went to worse as Leinster continued to dominate the breakdown as Gloucester tried to fight their way back into the game. The Cherry and Whites actually secured a decent turnover in their own 22, but immediately conceded possession and Max Deegan strolled over for his second, Cathal Marsh converting.

A moment of class then followed from Larmour as he chased a chip over the top, caught it on the volley and won the chase to touch down.

Gloucester hit back with a fine score, Ben Vellacott scorching down the left wing before passing inside for Andrew Symons to cross.

But Leinster responded in controversial style, Callum Braley seemingly tackled within 10 metres having taken a quick tap, only for Hugo Keenan to hack downfield and score, Marsh adding another conversion to rub salt into the wound.

Leinster Rugby Lineups

15. Rob Kearney; 14. Hugo Keenan, 13. Adam Byrne, 12. Isa Nacewa (capt), 11. Dave Kearney; 10. Ross Byrne, 9. Jamison Gibson-Park; 1. Peter Dooley, 2. Bryan Byrne, 3. Michael Bent, 4. Ian Nagle, 5. Scott Fardy, 6. Josh Murphy, 7. Jordi Murphy, 8. Max Deegan.

Replacements

16. Sean McNulty, 17. Ed Byrne, 18. Vakh Abdaladze, 19. Oisin Heffernan, 20. Oisin Dowling, 21. Charlie Rock, 22. Cathal Marsh, 23. Ian Fitzpatrick, 4. Mick Kearney, 7. Will Connors, 11. Barry Daly, 14. Fergus McFadden, 15. Jordan Larmour

Gloucester Rugby Lineups (first half)

15. David Halaifonua; 14. Charlie Sharples, 13. Henry Trinder, 12. Billy Twelvetrees, 11. Ollie Thorley; 10. Owen Williams, 9. Willi Heinz (capt); 1. John Afoa, 2. Henry Walker, 3. Fraser Balmain, 4. Ed Slater, 5. Jeremy Thrush, 6. Jake Polledri, 7. Lewis Ludlow, 8. Freddie Clarke

Gloucester Rugby (second half)

15. Tom Hudson; 14. Andrew Symons, 13. Matt Scott, 12. Mark Atkinson, 11. Henry Purdy; 10. Billy Burns, 9. Callum Braley, Ben Vellacott; 1. Cameron Orr, Josh Hohneck, 2. Joe Mullis, 3. Gareth Denman, 4. Tom Savage (capt), 5. Andy Cramond, Tom Denton, 6. Charlie Beckett, 7. Will Safe, 8. Freddie Clarke.

JC