

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, AUGUST 25, 2017

KINGSHOLM – TESTIMONIAL – CHARLIE SHARPLES

**GLOUCESTER TURN ON THE STYLE WITH IMPRESSIVE WIN
OVER SCARLETS**

KICK OFF 7.45 P.M.

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 40 SCARLETS 21

Match Report By Duncan Wood

Gloucester warmed up for next week's visit of the Exeter Chiefs with a confidence boosting 40-21 victory over a strong Scarlets side at Kingsholm on Friday evening in Charlie Sharples' testimonial game.

Five tries for Gloucester on the night, with a number of players producing fine individual performances. But it was the team effort that shone throughout as Gloucester dominated, only two late scores boosting the visitors' tally and restoring a bit of pride.

It was a good way for the team to finish off their preparations for next Friday's season opener, as Head Coach Johan Ackermann confirmed to the media after the game.

What particularly impressed Ackermann was the team's attitude when down to 14 men. The game could have slipped away at this point, but Gloucester dug deep and showed some real dog.

Tougher tests lie ahead, but this was a good Scarlets side, one featuring a host of internationals and the Welsh region certainly came to play.

However, once Gloucester survived the early assault and went into half-time on level terms, you could see the confidence levels rising. Some of the rugby produced in the second-half was top notch.

Only two late tries gave the score-line a slightly flattering edge for the visitors but, even then, Gloucester had the final word through Matt Scott's late try to sign off in style.

It was a curious one for fans arriving late – the Scarlets weren't playing in scarlet at all but resplendent in grey. Would it backfire as it did for Manchester United all those years ago?

The early moments for the visitors were promising. Forcing a penalty gave them an early five metre lineout, but Gloucester rose high to steal and ease the pressure. Tom Prydie then looked to be away but was called back for a forward pass.

Slick hands from the Gloucester forwards then took play to within metres of the Scarlets line, but the ball was held up off the ground and Gareth Davies produced a fine break from his own line to take play downfield. Entertaining stuff so far.

But not as entertaining as the opening try. Jeremy Thrush made a midfield bust and timed his offload to Willi Heinz perfectly. The newly-appointed skipper had it all to do but unleashed a great hand-off to go clear and score. Owen Williams converted.

Mark Atkinson then produced a break to match that of Thrush just minutes before and galloped into the opposition half. However, his long attempted pass to Henry Purdy was batted down by a despairing Scarlets hand.

The visitors were looking dangerous though, and more indiscipline gave them a golden attacking opportunity. Lewis Ludlow was yellow carded for pulling down the resultant maul, and it was all hands to the pumps in defence for Gloucester.

They were under the cosh for the next 10 minutes and displayed some incredible heart when pinned down near their own line. Ludlow returned with no damage on the scoreboard but, more worrying was the sight of Owen Williams leaving the field injured.

Having weathered the storm, Gloucester very nearly extended their lead with Billy Burns and Henry Purdy combining well but, with half-time approaching, the Scarlets drew level as Gareth Davies finished off a flowing attack, despite there being a hint of a forward pass to Scott Williams in the build-up. Rhys Patchell converted.

The Cherry and Whites then had a try chalked off for a forward pass, and couldn't take advantage of a five-metre lineout as the teams went into half-time level at 7 points apiece.

It had been a spirited performance from the Cherry and Whites to this point, going toe to toe with a very good Scarlets side and giving as good as they got. The work-rate and commitment had been first-class and they could feel aggrieved at not being in front.

But Gloucester shrugged off that disappointment at the start of the second-half, Henry Purdy finishing magnificently as he made ground down the left before chipping ahead and winning the chase to touch down.

And Purdy was involved again on 48 minutes as Gloucester extended the lead, latching on to Burns' crafty chip over the top. A couple of powerful carries took play on before Jeremy Thrush steamed on to a flat pass from Heinz to score. Burns converted for 19-7.

And exactly the same move led to the fourth try. Purdy made good ground, there was some great handling from John Afoa as Symons almost made the line. Heinz stayed patient and a looped pass put Mark Atkinson over. Burns converted again.

Purdy came close to adding to his tally on two more occasions as Gloucester looked to close the game out. But, to their credit, the Scarlets defended their line proudly throughout a prolonged period of Gloucester pressure.

However, the pressure did finally tell as the game went into the final ten minutes, Will Safe burrowing over from close range with Billy Twelvetrees converting to extend the lead to 33-7.

Gloucester still went looking for tries and laid siege to the Scarlets line only to concede two long range, and well taken tries. It was too late to have any impact upon the score-line but will give team and coaches something to think about.

As it was, Gloucester still went in search of a score to underline the performance and duly got one as Matt Scott touched down near the uprights with Billy Twelvetrees' subsequent conversion bringing matters to a close.

Gloucester Rugby Lineups

15. Billy Burns; 14. David Halaifonua, 13. Andy Symons, 12. Mark Atkinson, 11. Henry Purdy; 10. Owen Williams, 9. Willi Heinz (capt); 1. John Afoa, 2. Richard Hibbard, 3. Gareth Denman, 4. Tom Savage, 5. Jeremy Thrush, 6. Lewis Ludlow, 7. Jacob Rowan, 8. Ben Morgan.

Replacements:

16. Joe Mullis, 17. Alex Seville, 18. Fraser Balmain, 19. Ed Slater, 20. Freddie Clarke, 21. Ben Vellacott, 22. Billy Twelvetrees, 23. Matt Scott, 24. Ollie Thorley

Scarlets Lineups

15. Johnny McNicholl; 14. Tom Prydie, 13. Hadleigh Parkes, 12. Scott Williams (capt), 11. Morgan Williams; 10. Rhys Patchell, 9. Gareth Davies; 1. Wyn Jones, 2. Ryan Elias, 3. Samson Lee, 4. Jake Ball, 5. Tadgh Beirne, 6. Aaron Shingler, 7. Josh MacLeod, 8. Will Boyde.

Replacements:

16. Emyr Phillips, 17. Rob Evans, 18. Werner Kruger, 19. David Bulbring, 20. Lewis Rawlins, 21. John Barclay, 22. Jonathan Evans, 23. Rhys Jones, 24. Paul Asquith, 25. Aled Davies, 28. Tom Grabham