

Falcons swoop to swat Wasps



Try-saver

By Leipziger
January 4 2010

I'm sure I wasn't the only Falcons fan who woke up this morning wondering whether 4.30-6.30pm yesterday was just a dream – a dream of no tries but plenty of drama at Adams Park as our boys began 2010 with a first-ever win in High Wycombe. On a day of several missed kicks, Jimmy Gopperth's boot out-did those of three opponents to secure four points.

That takes us to three wins from six away league games in 2009/10 – if only we could sort the home form!!

Steve Bates selected the same side that so disappointed against Leeds a week previously, the only change being enforced as Hall Charlton replaced the injured Micky Young. Former Falcon Dave Walder, this season's most successful Premiership kicker going into the weekend, wore the home number ten shirt with Danny Cipriani at full-back.

Cheered on by a tiny but vocal away support, the Falcons conceded a penalty under the posts in the very first minute and Walder knocked it over easily. Wasps made much of the early running, although both Gopperth and Rob Vickerman almost found gaps in the Pests' defence in the first half.

Gopperth equalised but missed his next two kicks, the second hitting the bar, while Walder also hit the woodwork while missing two penalties.

On one away attack Gcobani Bobo was free on the right but Tane Tu'ipulotu preferred to turn inside – and a damning indictment on our attacking tactics was the obvious danger from Wasps when they spread quickly and used the pace of their three-quarters, but even when they got the ball over the line they couldn't score.

Following some heavy pressure on our line Simon Shaw finally forced his way over but referee Tim Wigglesworth could not decide whether Carl Hayman had held him up and so went to the TV.

With all eyes focused on the big screen, we could see Hayman's arm under the ball initially, before Shaw's arms moved forward. My opinion is that he probably grounded the ball but as we couldn't see, surely the try couldn't be given, and all but about ten or 15 people in the crowd were discontented to see the words No Try!

Gopperth put us into the lead just before half-time with a second penalty and on the stroke of the interval had a chance to increase the lead, but that kick went wide too, but with few people predicting an away win before kick-off 3-6 was more than acceptable!

We attacked more in the second half, and Gopperth increased the lead to six, but Wasps were never out of it and Tom Vardell looked particularly threatening against Charlie Amesbury, who in contrast to the rocks Bobo and Gopperth seemed to miss quite a few tackles.

As the clock edged towards the hour, Falcons in the crowd became increasingly nervous despite Cipriani slicing a simple penalty wide. Every minute seemed as long as ten as we knew Wasps would continue to create opportunities.

With a quarter of an hour to go, Cipriani delighted the Adams Park faithful by handing a penalty to Mark van Gisbergen, on as a replacement for Walder, to allow the ten-minute England international to reduce the lead back to three points.

A score now would be VERY useful to increase our lead back over three and also damage home morale, and Gopperth delivered a fourth penalty to make it 6-12. Not long now lads, you can do this!

It almost got even better with Tom Biggs, who after initially coming onto the right wing for Vickerman but then moving to the left when Rob Miller replaced Amesbury had looked lively, was tackled into touch barely two metres from the line. Aargh, stress!

With the clock ticking towards zero, Wasps were confined to halfway, and the only danger seemed that if they managed to break from their they would probably score under the posts and with a six-point lead we all knew what that would mean.

But the Falcons managed to turn over – just a few more seconds then kick it out! But with the ball at the feet of replacement scrum-half Chris Pilgrim, Wasps stole and steamed forward.

With away fans looking on in horror, Gopperth made a crucial tackle on five metres and Wasps spurned a glorious chance by ignoring Varndell free on the right, and when we eventually won a turnover Gopperth kicked behind, getting a bloody nose off the post but also winning the game for us!

Wow! I was going to say away wins are always so tense, but after Bath maybe they are either tense or brilliantly glorious, either way they are quite rare and a first ever win at Adams Park, a first win at Wasps since November 2001 and a first victory against them since February 2007 is certainly one to be celebrated!

Congratulations to the whole team, I know I mentioned Amesbury's leaky defence but he made a number of good runs in attack, while the scrum and lineout were rock-solid and Bobo had another good game to continue his recent strong form. Gopperth's goal-kicking remains inconsistent but going for points repeatedly was right yesterday and he deserves respect for keeping his head up and not losing his confidence.

Why oh why are we so inconsistent, playing so poorly against Leeds at home yet competing so well against Wasps away? Well, if any of us knew the answer we'd be managing the team, and contrast this to the debacle of Irish away a year earlier – a win against Gloucester next Sunday and suddenly all will be rosy again for a while.