

GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECHO

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BOER'S MEN LET THE WIN CHANCE SLIP IN SECOND HALF

GLOUCESTER STUNG BY ULSTER'S RALLY

ULSTER 14 GLOUCESTER 12

Gloucester's Heineken Cup hopes were left hanging by a thread after they fell victim to a superb Ulster fightback.

Jake Boer's men looked to have done enough in their quest for a priceless away victory at rain-swept Ravenhill last night ahead of their final pool six game with French champions Stade Francais at Kingsholm tomorrow week.

But 1999 European champions Ulster recovered from a 12-3 interval deficit to leave Gloucester floundering by scoring 11 unanswered second-half points through a Bryn Cunningham try and two David Humphreys penalties.

Fly-half Humphreys landed his winning kick seven minutes from time, keeping alive Ulster's outside chance of a quarter-final place.

Gloucester, though, now have to beat Stade Francais at Kingsholm and secure a winning bonus point in the process.

They must also beat them by three clear tries after the French team's 35-16 win at home to Cardiff last night which also netted them a bonus point.

Stade Francais' fourth and final try was scored in the final minute by Olivier Sarramea.

Henry Paul gave Gloucester the early ascendancy by kicking three penalties in terrible conditions.

And Simon Amor's 40th-minute drop-goal helped give Gloucester a healthy advantage before Ulster rallied.

While Paul and Amor shared the scoring honours, Gloucester's pack – with Boer, England prop Phil Vickery and number eight Adam Balding prominent – gave scrum-half Andy Gomarsall a platform to dictate matters.

But it ultimately proved to no avail as Gloucester once again disappointed on a big Heineken Cup occasion, confirmed when Amor sent a late drop-goal attempt wide.

The 11,500 crowd included about 2,000 Gloucester fans, as Ulster, beaten 55-13 at Kingsholm in October, went in search of their 12th successive Heineken Cup home win.

Both teams predictably tested out their kicking game during the initial flurries, and Amor pinned Ulster back through a couple of testing touch-finders.

Humphreys was narrowly wide with a fourth-minute penalty strike from 50 metres but Paul found his range 10 minutes later, rifling over a kick just inside Ulster's half which deservedly edged Gloucester ahead.

Flashes of individual brilliance were rare in soaking conditions but Humphreys showed his quality by producing a slashing midfield break which took Ulster deep into Gloucester territory for the first time.

And the alarm bells continued to ring when Gloucester failed to clear possession from a line-out, requiring a timely Gomarsall intervention behind his own try-line to deny Ulster.

It was a narrow escape for the visitors, before Gomarsall again proved Gloucester's talisman by launching a 70-metre kick to touch.

Paul doubled their lead with a 29th-minute penalty and Gloucester proved far more comfortable than Ulster on the ball, but they also took their chances, a fact underlined when Paul completed his penalty hat-trick after an Ulster scrum infringement five minutes before half-time.

Ulster, at least in the first half, could not match the efficiency of Gloucester's work around the forward fringes, although Humphreys booted a long-range penalty to open their account before a lively 40 minutes ended in controversial fashion.

Amor's drop-goal restored a nine-point lead for the visitors, but Ulster wing Tommy Bowe then had a try disallowed after he collected a kick from Humphreys.

Welsh referee Nigel Whitehouse ruled that Bowe was offside when he gathered possession, but it looked a poor decision.

Ulster struck first after the break, courtesy of an onside Bowe catching another Humphreys kick and sending a supporting Cunningham over.

Gloucester's response, inspired by a clever Paul chip, almost produced a try for wing Marcel Garvey, yet he could not pick up possession cleanly and the chance went begging.

Gloucester endured more frustration on the hour-mark. Garvey sprinted clear into Ulster's 22 before he was hauled down, but with visiting attackers queuing up out wide, centre Terry Fanolua dropped the ball. Humphreys then had the final say, landing two penalties in six minutes.

ULSTER : Cunningham, Bowe, Maggs, Steinmetz, Howe, Humphreys, Campbell, S. Best, R. Best, Moore, Longwell, McCullough, Feather, N. Best, Wilson.

Reps. Shields, McCormick, Frost, Ward, Doak, Larkin, Wallace.

GLOUCESTER : Goodridge, Garvey, Fanolua, Paul, Bailey, Amor, Gomarsall, Bezuidenhout, Parkes, Vickery, Eustace, Brown, Boer, Hazell, Balding.

Reps. Elloway, Sigley, Buxton, Forrester, Page, Mauger, Cornwell.

REFEREE : Nigel Whitehouse (Wales).

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