

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**FRIDAY, APRIL 8, 2011**

EDGELEY PARK – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

GLOUCESTER FUME BUT SALE TAKE THE SPOILS

SALE SHARKS 36 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 31

Match Report by Duncan Wood

Gloucester limped away from Edgeley Park on the wrong end of a 36-31 scoreline, bristling with indignation at a game that seemed to turn on a controversial refereeing decision.

Leading 10-6 in the final minute of the first half, Sale's Will Addison ran smack bang into his own man and Gloucester tacklers were denied the chance to get at him.

No decision came, Sale played on and duly scored the try that gave them a half time lead and the self-belief to go on and win the game.

Charlie Hodgson was imperious and he tormented Gloucester throughout the second half with a series of high kicks and rolling touch finders. He also found time to kick his goals and score a try!

Gloucester did actually look well set to hit back in the second half and were screaming for a penalty try when trailing 19-16 only to find themselves bizarrely penalised with the Sale scrum seemingly at sixes and sevens.

Moment later, they were undone by a sucker punch try for Addison, this time without blockers, and a second shortly afterwards from Paul Williams.

The Cherry and Whites were shattered by the sudden and unexpected turnaround and Hodgson nipping over for a fourth was the act of a pickpocket taking advantage of a punch-drunk boxer.

Jonny May's try provided a flicker of hope and a penalty try with just a minute left got Gloucester back within bonus point range but it was little consolation as the Kingsholm outfit pondered one that got away.

Credit to Sale who played as though their lives depended on it and, of course, they had Hodgson in supreme form. But it was a bitter disappointment for Gloucester for many reasons.

Gloucester made the trip up the M5 and M6 for this rearranged fixture knowing that a win would strengthen their claims for a playoff berth but also that the following pack, including Northampton Saints, were breathing down their necks.

Gloucester had an early chance to open the scoring as the Sharks were penalised at the game's opening scrum but Freddie Burns' penalty came back off the post.

Sale knocked on the rebound giving Gloucester a great attacking position and the pack won a second, more straightforward, penalty which Burns slotted with ease.

The home side almost came straight back after a Gloucester turnover but were denied a try for Lewaramu by a forward pass. However, a penalty followed and Charlie Hodgson levelled the scores.

It was high tempo stuff, there were errors from both sides and Sale drew gasps of disbelief as they threw long into midfield at a lineout near their own line but got away with it.

Gloucester did look to have an edge in the tight and the pack made it count on 18 minutes, setting up a great position. Burns drifted across the pitch and Tim Molenaar cut a smart angle to break a tackle and make the line. Burns converted for 10-3 after 19 minutes.

However, the restart was handled untidily giving Sale good field position from which a penalty followed and Hodgson narrowed the gap to 10-6 with his second successful penalty.

Hodgson, predictably, was the class act in a blue shirt at this point and his tactical kicking, as well as his goal kicking, was posing problems. But Sale lost some experience on 26 minutes when Ben Cohen limped out of the action.

Gloucester looked comfortable and the forwards again almost set up a score but a couple of harsh penalties gave Sale a chance to hit back and Hodgson made it 10-9 after 31 minutes.

Gloucester could feel aggrieved, especially as one of them penalised the tackler for rolling away mere nano seconds after making the tackle, but the home team had their tails up as half time approached.

Burns did extend the lead with a 38th minute penalty before referee Davey made an incredible, possible game changing, decision.

Will Addison ran into his own man in midfield but nothing was given despite Gloucester tacklers in the vicinity. Tuilagi carried on the move and Paul Williams tiptoed his way down the touchline and dived over. Hodgson converted for 16-13 at half time.

It was a bitter blow for Gloucester who had defended with ease throughout the first half. A more obvious block or accidental offside will not be seen all season. Could Gloucester respond?

They could as they quickly charged down a Sale clearance and poured through to claim possession. The home side held out but conceded a penalty in the shadow of their own posts and Burns levelled the scores.

The parity was short-lived as Hodgson slotted his fourth penalty to nudge his side back in front after Nick Wood was penalised at the next scrum to further infuriate the Gloucester followers.

Gloucester hit back furiously with Akapusi Qera carrying with power and Rory Lawson showing an eye for the gap. Dave Attwood almost smashed his way to the line but was just short. A 5m scrum followed and Gloucester seemed set to drive over but were mystifyingly penalised.

And Bryan Redpath's side were then stunned by a breakaway try. Turnover ball was hoofed downfield and Jonny May was undone by the bounce. Will Addison gathered and just made the line despite Tom Voyce's tackle. 24-16 after 54 minutes.

Gloucester were rattled and another high ball created havoc. Sale re-gathered, moved into the 22 and worked the phases until Paul Williams spotted a gap and went over. Hodgson converted for 31-16. It was a massive turnaround after the home side had been under huge pressure.

Tim Taylor landed a penalty and Hodgson was, for once, off target with one but cut open the defence on 63 minutes only for Neil Briggs to drop a potential try scoring pass.

Hodgson, though, caught Gloucester napping after 64 minutes as he took a quick tap with a man down receiving treatment and nipped over to score. 36-19 and Gloucester left shaking their heads in disbelief.

They did hit back. Trinder's break and long floated pass found the flying May and the winger showed great pace to score although Taylor couldn't convert.

Again, the Gloucester eight imposed themselves and secured a penalty try which they maybe should have had earlier in the piece and Taylor converted for 36-31 but it was as close as Gloucester got as the clock ran out.

JC