

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SUNDAY, MAY 15, 2011

VICARAGE ROAD – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

HEARTBREAK FOR GLOUCESTER IN SARACENS SEMI-FINAL

SARACENS 12 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 10

Match Report by Duncan Wood

Gloucester suffered semi-final heartbreak as their Twickenham dreams were shattered courtesy of an Owen Farrell penalty just seven minutes from time which earned a 12-10 win for Saracens at Vicarage Road.

Gloucester gave it everything although they looked as though they would be blown away in the first half.

However, they dug deep and benefitted from several missed penalties from the home side and, tantalisingly, took a 12-10 lead on 70 minutes.

But it wasn't to be. Farrell slotted a nerveless penalty and Gloucester's season came to a sad end.

Half an hour before kick-off, the only supporters in the stadium were wearing Cherry and White but, clutching their free tabards and flags, the home fans arrived late and the atmosphere was electric come kick off.

Gloucester wanted a good start but Robinson's kick off was just too long and went out on the full and Gloucester were penalised at the opening scrum. However, Wigglesworth dragged his penalty attempt way left.

The home team looked set to throw the kitchen sink at Gloucester in the opening stages and it was all hands to the pumps in defence.

However, clever hands and lines of running opened Gloucester up on halfway on 5 minutes and winger James Short had the pace and strength to seemingly make the line only for the TMO to rule that Rory Lawson tackled him into touch at the corner.

A penalty followed and Alex Goode took over kicking duties only for his kick to barely get off the ground. Gloucester had enjoyed three let-offs in the first five minutes and had barely touched the ball.

Another penalty followed for Saracens on 9 minutes as Gloucester used hands in the ruck and this time Owen Farrell went for goal only to hit the right hand upright. Lady luck continued to shine but Gloucester badly needed possession.

A much-needed penalty allowed Gloucester to move into Saracens territory for the first time and a kickable penalty followed after a dangerous run from Simpson-Daniel. However, from wide left, Robinson struck it well but was just off target.

A foot in touch at the drop out was gathered gifting Saracens field position and yet another duly followed after powerful work from the home back row. Farrell finally bisected the posts for 3-0 after 17 minutes.

Gloucester were working hard to try and stretch Saracens but the home defensive line was flying up and handling errors at key times prevented any sustained possession.

Just such a knock on allowed Farrell to kick Saracens downfield. The home team stole a Gloucester throw, Brits made a half break and Gloucester transgressed at the ruck. Farrell added a simple penalty for 6-0 after 23 minutes.

The individual errors continued to haunt Gloucester. A knock on gave Saracens a scrum in good field position and another penalty followed only for Farrell to push it wide.

The pressure wasn't over and Gloucester had to withstand a 5 metre lineout. Ernst Joubert was perilously close but heroic defence kept the line intact.

It gave Gloucester a boost and Tim Molenaar finally made the first line break of the day but the support wasn't quite there and Saracens survived, despite a real suspicion of offside as Gloucester looked to recycle.

Salt was almost rubbed into the wound as the home team kicked high downfield and Luke Narryway was adjudged to have blocked a chaser. Farrell again went for goal and, amazingly, again hit the upright.

A boxing match may have already been stopped by this point but Gloucester were still fighting. Robinson made a great break but his long pass to an unmarked Charlie Sharples was just too high.

No matter. Gloucester nicked the lineout and tested the home defence to the full leading to a penalty which Robinson slotted to make the half time score 6-3.

It had almost been one way traffic and Gloucester had dodged more bullets than a character from the Matrix. But Redpath's side were fighting as if their lives depended on it. Saracens had dominated but missed five penalties.

There was everything to play for. Would the missed chances haunt the home side? Gloucester were still in it but would have to cut out the errors if they were to emerge triumphant.

However, one followed straight from the restart. Narryway dropped the kick off and Jim Hamilton gathered in an offside position. It was a gift penalty and Farrell made no mistake.

There was an immediate chance to a response as Alex Goode held on in the tackle following a great chase from Paul Doran-Jones but Robinson drew the penalty across the face of the posts.

A ferocious spell of play followed with both sides throwing everything at each other. However, the defences were winning the battle at this stage.

It was still a one score game and remained so when Farrell pulled another penalty attempt after Gloucester came in at the side of a ruck.

The tension rose a notch on 63 minutes when Alex Brown was taken out at a lineout on halfway and Steve Borthwick was given a straight yellow. Could Gloucester take advantage?

They certainly could. A Farrell drop goal was charged down and Gloucester countered. Burns found Simpson-Daniel and his inside ball sent Robinson clear and under the posts. The fly half looked winded but slotted the conversion to edge Gloucester into a 9-10 lead with just ten minutes to go.

Glory beckoned but the Men in Black came back and earned a penalty when Gloucester looked to be harshly adjudged at a ruck. Farrell kept his cool and kicked the penalty for a 12-10 lead.

It went down to the wire. Gloucester had one last piece of possession but couldn't quite work a kickable position and the Men in Black held firm to book their place at Twickenham.

JC