

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2011

SANDY PARK – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

GLOUCESTER BATTLE TO HARD EARNED WIN AT CHIEFS

EXETER CHIEFS 19 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 24

Match Report by Duncan Wood

Gloucester put the disappointment of losing at home last weekend to clinch a hard earned but much needed 24-19 away win at Exeter on Saturday afternoon, their first win on the road since late February.

It was a win that Gloucester needed and it was a win that they deserved for their efforts on the day.

Exeter didn't gift wrap the win, it had to be earned and it was secured through hard work, team work and taking the chances when they came along.

Gloucester actually spent large portions of the second half in defence as the Chiefs dug deep in front of their own supporters to try and claw their way back into the game.

But the Cherry and White clad tacklers put their bodies on the line time and again and, crucially, did so in a disciplined manner that denied the Chiefs shots at goal.

Also of great importance was the first half effort when Exeter were prevented from gaining any real momentum and building a significant lead with the wind at their backs.

In fact, Qera's try late in the first half meant that Gloucester turned around in front and that proved to be vital.

The win is a huge morale booster as Gloucester sign off in the Aviva Premiership for a couple of weeks and prepare for European action and, especially, a reward for the supporters who travelled to support them today.

Matchday dawned bright and clear at Sandy Park although the swirling breeze that can make goal kicking such a challenge was visibly present.

Despite the tragic incident on the M5 the evening before, there was a good away following present and everyone connected with Gloucester hoped for a better outcome than the same fixture last season.

However, it was the Chiefs who made a bright start as they were awarded a penalty for a Gloucester offence at a ruck in the very first minute. With the wind behind him, Gareth Steenson made no mistake for a 3-0 lead.

Gloucester came straight back. The pack won a penalty at scrum time and then drove the lineout to within metres of the Exeter line. Qera made good ground before Freddie Burns half broke a tackle and his stretch just made the line. He converted his own try for a 7-3 lead.

The pressure was instantly back on Gloucester as the Chiefs executed a neat lineout drive. The pack took it on but were held up over the line.

A series of five metre scrums followed and Gloucester conceded two penalties but regrouped to force a knock on from Tom Johnson to temporarily relieve the pressure.

That pressure was straight back on as Matt Jess sliced through several would be tackles and was only halted a metre short. Gloucester held, but only just.

Wave after wave of attack followed and Gloucester looked to be holding but tight head prop Hoani Tui eventually burrowed over from close range. Steenson pulled his conversion but Exeter were back in front 8-7 after 19 minutes.

There was an immediate chance to reclaim the lead but Burns' attempted penalty from in front and just outside the 22 held up against the strong wind and drifted just wide of the right-hand upright.

Gloucester spent some good time in the home 22 as they disrupted both scrum and lineout ball but couldn't capitalise and Steenson was eventually able to clear the lines.

And Steenson was again the man of the moment on 31 minutes as he stroked home a penalty for 11-7 when Gloucester were penalised at a scrum on their own 10 metre line.

The Chiefs then turned down a kick at goal in favour of a quick tap and paid the price as a Hamilton lineout steal snatched possession for Gloucester who moved downfield for Qera to shrug off a weak tackle and power over. Burns added an excellent conversion to snatch the lead at 11-14.

There was even a chance for Burns to add to the lead as the pack won another penalty at scrum time but the effort from halfway was probably over-ambitious and held up in the wind.

Gloucester could take great heart from the first half efforts. The commitment in defence had carried over from last weekend and the pack were once again applying pressure.

The backs were looking sharp when they had some room to manoeuvre and Freddie Burns would now be able to kick with the wind at his back.

However, a three point half time lead was slender and the Chiefs a dangerous opponent. A massive second half effort would still be required.

Things started well initially. Chief's scrum half Phibbs put in a box kick that went straight up in the air, catching his pack offside, but Burns was off target with the penalty.

The next penalty went to the corner and the pack very nearly drove over from 15 metres out but were bundled into touch at the corner.

Gloucester weren't to be denied as Hamilton stole another lineout. Patient phases followed before the ball was released left and Voyce put Morgan into the corner. Burns converted for 11-21.

The home response was instant as they moved into the Gloucester 22 and made some sharp yards around the ruck area as Gloucester scrambled to keep the lead intact but superb defence kept the Chiefs at bay.

However, some of that good work was undone as referee Small awarded another penalty at scrum time and Ignacio Mieres slotted the penalty for 14-21 after 65 minutes.

It was a time for cool heads and it was the home team who got a bit excited as they suddenly decided to try and move the ball from their own line only to get caught holding on to possession. Burns landed the penalty to create some breathing space.

There was still a huge amount of work to do defensively as time ticked by in the final few minutes as the Chiefs threw the kitchen sink at Gloucester but the Cherry and Whites were in no mood to relinquish their hard-earned lead.

There was a late alarm as Kevin Barrett picked off an errant pass and put Matt Jess into the corner for the Chiefs' second try but time was already up and Gloucester had the win.

JC