

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2011

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

GLOUCESTER DENIED AT KINGSHOLM BY FEROCIOUS TIGERS

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 14 LEICESTER TIGERS 19

Match Report by Duncan Wood

Despite a tremendous effort, Gloucester were defeated at home for the third time in succession as the Leicester Tigers just edged a titanic tussle between these sides by 19 points to 14 on Saturday.

Recent encounters between these two sides have been hard fought with hardly anything to choose between the two sides.

Gloucester were looking for their third successive win over the visitors at Kingsholm however the Tigers had won their previous five in all competitions. Both those previous Gloucester wins had been tight and nothing else was expected today.

And so it proved. There was never more than a score between the two teams as they traded blow for blow and the lead changed hands several times.

However, the pivotal moment was one of good fortune as Alesana Tuilagi charged down an attempted kick through from Charlie Sharples and ran it back for a crucial score.

It was cruel on Gloucester who had just taken the lead via a Luke Narraway interception try. That score itself involved a measure of luck but few would have begrudged Gloucester that after the way they took the game to the Tigers.

The visitors were on the back foot for large period of the first half but Gloucester were up against yet another superb defence and couldn't find the combination to unlock it.

Indeed, the shrewd opinion at half time was that the wind at Gloucester's backs in the first period was a 10 pointer and a 6-3 lead at the break wouldn't be enough.

However, the Cherry and Whites showed great mettle to hit back after conceding the lead to a Toby Flood try only for Tuilagi's intervention to swing the game decisively.

The defeat leaves Gloucester facing a trip north to one of their least favourite venues in recent times, Newcastle, needing a win to maintain their position in the top half of the table.

It will be tough but Gloucester will take heart from having only just finished second best to one of the top teams in the country.

Gloucester enjoyed good early possession at the outset on Saturday but ran into some ferocious Tigers tackling and twice were penalised at the ruck area in the opening stages when in a promising position.

The first attacking threat came with ball in hand as Freddie Burns jinked his way clear in midfield before attempting to outpace Alesana Tuilagi on the outside only for Tom Croft to make a try-saving cover tackle.

It had been all Gloucester in the opening stages but it wasn't reflected on the scoreboard.

Leicester finally got some possession and used the low kick cleverly against the wind to gain territory before Gloucester were again penalised at the ruck and Flood confidently kicked the penalty for a 3-0 lead after 14 minutes.

The lead didn't last long, however, as Gloucester were quickly back on the front foot and Freddie Burns levelled the scores with a straightforward penalty.

Burns was also kicking beautifully out of hand and turning the Tigers back three wherever possible with a series of testing kicks.

The only thing missing was a go ahead score but frustrating handling errors and a number of penalties conceded in Tigers territory were slowing the Gloucester momentum.

Good work from the pack though gave Burns another shot at goal on 32 minutes as they forced a penalty at a Leicester scrum and Burns made no mistake for a 6-3 lead.

It provoked a furious spell of Gloucester pressure with Lesley Vainikolo running powerfully when given a bit of room but the try remained elusive and the scores remained unchanged at half time.

There was very little between the two sides at half time. Defences were very much on top and there had been some shuddering hits, especially a combined effort from Strokosch and Qera.

Qera was looking in the same rampaging form that he's enjoyed in recent weeks and his continued contribution would be crucial in the second half, as would Freddie Burns who would now have to control the game into the wind.

Discipline would also be vital as Flood would doubtless be eyeing up the posts from distance with the wind at his back in the second half.

As if to demonstrate the strength of the wind, Geordan Murphy tried a drop from well inside his own half at the resumption but was well off target.

Burns then had to rescue Gloucester as he covered a cunning kick through from Tuilagi but was promptly collared by Twelvetrees and a 5m scrum was conceded.

The initial surge was resisted but Toby Flood dropped a lovely grubber in behind the onrushing defensive line but just couldn't ground the ball after extensive consultation with the TMO. Advantage was being played though, and Flood kicked the penalty to level the scores.

Gloucester hit back and took advantage of a loose Leicester lineout as Ayerza took out Rory Lawson without the ball and Burns' penalty restored the lead.

An escape followed for Gloucester as Tuilagi almost latched on to a floated cross kick from Flood but knocked on as he rose higher than Charlie Sharples with an open run to the line beckoning.

Indiscipline then cost Gloucester dear as they allowed the Tigers to escape from a position near their own line and move downfield.

Matt Smith made a half break in midfield off good lineout ball and a quick clear out gave Flood the space to make the line for an 11-9 lead.

It looked like a mortal blow for Gloucester but lady luck shone on Bryan Redpath's side as skipper Luke Narryway picked off an errant Tigers pass on halfway and had the pace to hold off Toby Flood and make the line.

14-11 was a narrow lead and Gloucester knew that they would need at least one further score and duly went in search of it. And that was when the luck ran out.

Charlie Sharples found himself in a promising position out wide and tried to drill a low kick past Alesana Tuilagi.

However, the ball rebounded off Tuilagi and bounced kindly for the Samoan who had a clear run for the corner despite the best efforts of the covering Freddie Burns.

This really was a body blow for the Cherry and Whites but still they came back at Leicester who gritted their teeth and dug deep in defence.

However, despite the obvious efforts on display, there was no way through the Leicester defensive line and Gloucester seemed to be on the rough end of some refereeing decisions in the final ten minutes.

Ben Youngs actually came closest to crossing the try line when his snipe around a ruck almost took him to the line.

Gloucester scrambled and killed that threat but Flood added his third penalty a few minutes before the end to seal the 19-14 win.

JC