

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 14, 2012**

**TWICKENHAM STOOP – HEINEKEN CUP**

**GALLANT GLOUCESTER DENIED BY LATE QUINS TRY**

**HARLEQUINS 20 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 14**

**Match Report by Duncan Wood**

The bounce of a rugby ball can be a cruel thing at times and it hurt Gloucester at the Stoop on Saturday evening as a wicked bounce led to the try that won the game for Harlequins.

Gloucester had absorbed a lot of pressure from the home side as they clung on to a 14-13 lead with less than ten minutes to go but Danny Care's grubber kick evaded Charlie Sharples before bouncing off Quins full back Mike Brown's legs and the full back dived on the ball for the crucial score.

Even then, Gloucester were determined [not] to let their dwindling Heineken Cup hopes fade completely and laid siege to the Quins line.

With time up on the clock, they looked to have carved out a glorious scoring chance but the ball was knocked on and Quins had the win.

It was cruel on Bryan Redpath's side who had fought doggedly and led the game for the majority of the second half.

Neither side was really at its best and Quins' Nick Evans had a rare off day with the boot but Gloucester can take heart from the way they took the home side right to the brink.

Gloucester came into the game knowing it was pretty much do or die with regard to their Heineken Cup qualification and also looking perhaps to put the record straight after the reverse in the previous meeting in this competition.

Jonny May was named at full back following the unfortunate knee injury to Olly Morgan, Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu returned in the centre and Dario Chistolini got the nod at tight head as Bryan Redpath made three changes to his starting line-up.

Gloucester would have been looking for a positive start but immediately conceded a penalty in midfield only for the normally reliable Nick Evans to pull his kick wide.

It was a tough first few minutes for Gloucester and they dodged a bullet on 7 minutes after a turnover when Fa'asavalu burst into the 22 on the counter attack but offloaded clumsily to Matt Hopper who knocked on.

Freddie Burns then got a break as his kick was half charged down but fell kindly for Luke Narraway to break downfield. Quins got back but conceded a penalty and Burns bisected the posts for a 3-0 lead.

The lead was brief as Gloucester couldn't claim the restart and conceded a penalty at the subsequent scrum which gave Evans an easy opportunity to level the scores and he made no mistake.

A string of penalties were conceded and Gloucester looked to be living on borrowed time and so it proved.

Monye made good ground down the left into the Gloucester 22 but his speculative pass inside should have been snaffled up.

Instead, it fell kindly for Mike Brown who nearly made the line but the supporting Matt Hopper duly did. Evans converted for a 10-3 lead after 19 minutes.

Burns pushed a difficult penalty attempt wide shortly afterwards but then produced a gem of a kick over Mike Brown's head to pin Quins back deep in their 22 and nailed a penalty after the home team were pinged at the next scrum.

Burns was having a curate's egg of a game. He missed a penalty to touch, mis-fielded the rebound but promptly rolled another beauty into touch in the Quins 22 to restore field position.

It paid dividends as James Simpson-Daniel drifted in off his wing to break through the Quins midfield and ghosted over the line. Burns' conversion hit the post and stayed out but Gloucester had a narrow 11-10 lead on the half hour.

The final few minutes of the first half were an important one for Gloucester and they produced some physical defence to keep Quins behind the gain line.

However, they were eventually penalised for offside in the backs but Evans stunned the crowd by missing another kickable one and send the teams into half time with Gloucester leading 11-10.

It had been a strong first half effort from the Cherry and Whites who had managed to largely subdue the Quins attacking threat despite Danny Care trying to put pace on the game as usual.

Perhaps the biggest concern was the penalty count but the commitment in defence and willingness to go wide in attack couldn't be faulted.

A predictably strong start to the second half followed from the home side as they sought to regain the upper hand. An early penalty opportunity was earned but Evans was again off target but made amends on 47 minutes for a 13-11 lead.

The seesaw nature of this game wasn't over just yet, however, as Burns nudged Gloucester back in front on 54 minutes after a strong scrummage effort gave the young fly half a shot at the posts.

A really good spell followed for the Cherry and Whites and they looked to have cracked the Quins defence on more than one occasion only for desperate tackling to save the day.

Burns narrowly missed a 64th minute penalty and, buoyed by the escape, the home team broke downfield and forced a 5 metre scrum.

Several penalties followed against Gloucester and Nick Wood was eventually yellow carded to give Quins the man advantage but Gloucester miraculously held out; awarded the penalty when Care looked to have scampered home.

However, Quins then got the break as Sharples couldn't field Care's grubber and the ball bounced kindly off Mike Brown's legs for the full back to score. Evans rubbed salt into the wound with the conversion.

Gloucester gallantly hit back and forced a 5 metre lineout to send a nervous shiver around the Stoop but they couldn't convert as a Simpson-Daniel knock on ended play with Quins hanging on.

JC