

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, MARCH 24, 2012

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 27 EXETER CHIEFS 28

It was the first occasion that a Televised Match Official was in use for a non-televised fixture and the experiment proved crucial as the vital decision went the Exeter's way[*sic*].

Gareth Steenson converted Aly Muldowney's try and the Chiefs snatched a 28-27 victory to silence the Kingsholm faithful who were preparing to celebrate a famous Gloucester comeback.

In all honestly, Exeter were good value for the win. They definitely owned the first half and Gloucester went into the half time interval scratching their heads in bewilderment.

Gloucester were below par but the Chiefs were certainly on their game and the Cherry and Whites needed to dig deep in the second half.

Which they did, and in some style. Three tries in seven minutes seemed to have swung the game decisively the way of Gloucester but the Chiefs had the final word.

Defeat was a bitter pill for Gloucester to swallow but the Chiefs deserved it on the day and now look well set for Heineken Cup qualification.

Gloucester need to regroup and bounce back in style at Adams Park next weekend if the season isn't to slip away from them.

A beautiful day at Kingsholm greeted both teams with the scene set fair for a cracking encounter between the fifth and sixth placed teams in the Aviva Premiership table.

It was a nervy opening few minutes and the visitors enjoyed much of the early possession although James Simpson-Daniel lifted the home crowd with a dangerous run.

And Gloucester were first on the scoreboard as Freddie Burns slotted a good long-range penalty after a rare foray into Chiefs territory.

The game started to open up and both teams had chances. Dollman made a superb break from his own 22 which came to nothing while Tom Johnson saved the day for the Chiefs as he chased back to deny Jonny May as he chased a kick ahead.

Mieres was off target with a long-range penalty but the visitors then stunned the home crowd as superb offloading gave prop Craig Mitchell a short rumble to the line and he scored under the posts. Mieres converted easily for a 7-3 lead.

It had been frantic stuff and the Chiefs had probably been the better team. Gloucester needed to settle and were unlucky when a penalty from Burns hit the post and rebounded clear.

Gloucester were growing frustrated as they struggled to get into the game and it spilled over when Jim Hamilton was sinbinned for foul play on the half hour.

It was an important phase of the game as Gloucester really needed to get to half time to regroup but they were undone again on 36 minutes.

James Scaysbrook made a half break and quick recycled ball gave Mieres the chance to put Matt Jess into the corner with a long pass. Mieres was narrowly wide with the conversion but the visitors had a decent 12-3 lead.

Bad went to worse. Burns failed to find touch and Dollman ran it back with interest. Quick offloading had Gloucester on the rack and the Chiefs were only denied by the TMO.

Play came back for a penalty and Mieres made no mistake for a 15-3 half time scoreline, a lead the Chiefs were very good value for.

The visitors had kept Gloucester off balance with a fast offloading game whereas Gloucester had only threatened to unleash their strike runners on rare occasions.

The Chiefs were also getting under the skin of the Gloucester players and tempers were looking more frayed the longer the half went on.

It was a very subdued performance from Bryan Redpath's side and they would certainly need to emerge a different side for the second half.

There was a positive start as Burns slotted a long range penalty to narrow the deficit and Hamilton returned from the sin bin but there was a long way to go. There was plenty of effort but Gloucester were looking surprisingly low on confidence and a stream of unforced errors were costing them dear.

That was typified when Burns couldn't pick up a low pass at his toes. Haydn Thomas gathered and made good ground, earning a penalty and Mieres had no trouble extending the lead to 18-6 from in front of the posts.

Burns very nearly redeemed himself immediately with a stunning break from his own, chipping ahead as he reached the last man but the Chiefs just held out on their own line.

Finally, Gloucester came good. The pack sapped the legs with a couple of punishing drives before Fuimaono-Sapolu hit James Simpson-Daniel with a long cut-out pass and the winger was in for the score. Burns converted superbly for 13-18.

Burns then dipped into his box of tricks with a sublime chip and gather before sidestepping the last man and diving under the posts for a sensational score. He duly converted his own score to set up a thrilling final quarter.

From nowhere, Gloucester were on fire. Simpson-Daniel wriggled clear, Fuimaono-Sapolu was in support before Nick Runciman took the offload and dived over. Burns converted again to open up a 27-18 gap.

Though visibly rocked, the Chiefs weren't done but Steenson was narrowly off target with a 66th minute penalty which would have moved them back into losing bonus point range.

Still the Chiefs came back and concerted pressure led to another penalty opportunity from Steenson and this time he made no mistake for 27-21 with just seven minutes remaining.

The pressure came on again although a Jim Hamilton lineout steal near the Gloucester line looked a mortal blow for the Chiefs.

But, back they came. A quick tap penalty caught Gloucester napping and Muldowney was ruled to have touched down under a pile of bodies. Steenson converted and the Chiefs celebrated like there was no tomorrow.

JC