

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, APRIL 14, 2012**

**KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP**

**GLOUCESTER ROCKED AS FALCONS SWOOP TO VICTORY**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 20 NEWCASTLE FALCONS 29**

**Match Report by Duncan Wood**

Gloucester's recent run of indifferent form continued as Newcastle Falcons, fighting for Premiership survival, battled to a 29-20 win at Kingsholm on Saturday afternoon.

The defeat was a bitter blow to Gloucester's chances of Heineken Cup qualification for next season with the manner of the defeat perhaps the most disappointing.

The errors that have characterised recent performances were present once again as was the habit of letting a late lead slip.

All credit to the Falcons who have steadfastly refused to throw in the towel despite being rooted at the bottom of the table for so long. They fought hard and had a couple of canny operators running the show at half back.

But the fact of the matter was that they simply didn't have to work very hard for their points. Time and again, possession and territory was too readily conceded and led to points from Jimmy Gopperth's metronomic boot.

Ally Hogg's try on the stroke of half time, a sickening blow for Gloucester, came from a botched Gloucester lineout and the killer blow from Mark Wilson was another soft score.

The second half performance from Bryan Redpath's side, having trailed 19-6 at half time, was better. However, Gloucester were chasing the game as they've had to do so often in recent weeks.

It's a missed opportunity and Gloucester slip to seventh in the Aviva Premiership table with next week's game at home to the Sale Sharks taking on massive proportions.

Conditions were ideal as the game got underway, cool and dry, with both teams needing nothing less than a win.

Given the importance of the game, it was a nervy opening. The Falcons used the box kick a lot in the opening exchanges but Gloucester edged the territorial battle.

However, on their first foray into the Gloucester half, the visitors nicked a lineout which led to an offside in midfield, and Jimmy Gopperth had an easy kick to open the scoring.

There was a palpable air of tension around Kingsholm, not helped by a series of basic errors as the Cherry and Whites sought to impose themselves on the game.

Referee Wigglesworth was winning no friends locally with his refereeing of the game especially when he penalised Gloucester again on 19 minutes and Gopperth made it 6-0.

Gloucester finally got a decision from the restart, to ironic cheers from the home faithful, and Freddie Burns drilled the penalty through the uprights. It was a welcome boost.

There were signs of things coming together as Jonny May burst onto a flat pass from Tindall and was almost clear but Gloucester had to settle for a second penalty from Burns to level the scores.

The parity was short-lived as Gloucester failed to take advantage of a stolen lineout, pulled down a maul and Gopperth was again on target.

The home response was quick as Tindall bust a hole through midfield. Scott Lawson and Charlie Sharples almost made the line but the Falcons held out.

Things were definitely going the way of the Falcons and they took full advantage of a fortunate bounce to set up a position from which Gopperth landed his fourth penalty.

Gloucester were proving to be their own worst enemies. With a minute left until half time, loose lineout ball was snaffled by the Falcons.

The irrepressible Gopperth made a half break and offloaded out of the tackle to Hogg who scored under the posts. The fly half converted for a 19-6 half time lead.

The home side left the field to boos, some of which may have been directed at the officials. The Kingsholm crowd weren't happy for sure.

In all honesty, it had been another 40 minutes to forget for the Cherry and Whites who were simply struggling to get anything going.

Newcastle hadn't had to do anything to create scores, they were simply being handed on a plate to them and major work needed to be done at half time.

Gloucester did come out with a bit of purpose with skipper Luke Narryaway leading the way with a couple of powerful breaks.

The Falcons defence was still resolute as Gloucester weren't clinical enough and couldn't finish and a 46th minute Burns penalty was the only reward.

A missed tackle on Jamie Helleur promptly handed the initiative straight back to the Falcons. Gloucester conceded a scrummage penalty but Gopperth was, for once, narrowly off target.

His miss wasn't too costly in the current content of the game and was matched moments later when Burns was off target with an effort from inside his own half.

The Cherry and Whites desperately needed a boost and it almost came as Jonny May looped around James Simpson-Daniel, the winger showing superb hands, but May was bundled into touch at the corner.

The game moved into the final quarter and Gloucester continued to press, but they were still getting little change out of Newcastle and again had to settle for a penalty from Burns to make it 12-19.

The home side were finally starting to get the upper hand and, importantly, remaining patient and not forcing things.

Replacement flanker Alasdair added some real impetus and finally, after good work from Scott Lawson and Mike Tindall, Akapusi powered over in the corner. Burns couldn't add the extras but Gloucester were back in it at 17-19.

Simpson-Daniel then very nearly broke through with that swivel of the hip oh so familiar to Gloucester fans, but was halted by a desperate last-ditch tackle. Play came back for a penalty and Burns nudged Gloucester in front by a single point.

The agony continued though as Tindall was penalised at a ruck following the restart and Gopperth nailed the penalty for a 22-20 lead with seven minutes left to play.

Gloucester regrouped and went all out for the win but it was the Falcons who had the final, decisive word.

A lineout in the Gloucester 22 was intended for James Hudson but overthrew. It fell into the grasp of replacement flanker Mark Wilson and he romped home untouched. It summed up the day.