

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2012**

**KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**GLOUCESTER COME UP JUST SHORT AGAINST STREETWISE SAINTS**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 19 NORTHAMPTON SAINTS 24**

After a first half in which Gloucester were arguably second best, a brave comeback after the interval saw Nigel Davies' side come up just short as Northampton took the spoils by 24 points to 19.

Director of Rugby Davies had stressed in the build up to this game that his Gloucester side are a work in progress, a unit that have only been together for a short space of time.

But what was impressive today, was the way the team responded to adversity and almost snatched a victory from a nigh on impossible situation.

Having battled their way back into the game at 17-12, George Pisi's second half try would have broken most teams. But the Cherry and Whites dogged out a penalty try and so very nearly scored what would have been a winning try.

All that was lacking in a frenetic final few minutes was a little composure and a couple of wrong options were taken in the heat of the moment.

That was the difference between the two sides. The Saints have been together a long time, were well drilled and took their chances.

However, despite the defeat, Gloucester can take great heart from the fact that they fought back to push a very good side all the way.

There is work to do of course. No-one will deny that. But the signs are that Gloucester Rugby are moving in the right direction.

Kingsholm was buzzing as kick off approached, the Red Devils 'dropping in' with the match ball to rapturous applause from a home crowd hungry for the return of Aviva Premiership rugby.

Both teams used the opening few minutes to feel their way into the game but it was first blood to the Saints as a powerful catch and drive rumbled into a scoring position.

It was all hands to the pumps in defence but Gloucester held out to the delight of the home crowd.

It was breathless stuff in the opening 12 minutes. The Saints had the upper hand in the driving maul but the Gloucester defence was tenacious and giving nothing away.

The one real moment of class was a touch finder from Freddie Burns that pinned the Saints back on their own line but the visitors cleared their lines efficiently.

Saints then struck from a scrum that looked to have broken up. Dickson and Foden made good ground down the right and Tonga'uiha carried on powerfully.

Gloucester were stretched as the ball came back quickly and George Pisi cut back against the grain of a scrambling defence to score the game's first try. Ryan Lamb converted for a 7-0 lead after 18 minutes.

A second try came almost straight away. Another driving maul got the Saints going forward but a forward-looking pass was the key moment as slick offloading kept the move alive until a knock on near the home line.

However, the Saints turned over the Gloucester scrum ball and hooker Dylan Hartley pounced from close range. Lamb added another good conversion for a 14-0 lead.

Gloucester needed to settle and enjoyed a good spell of possession leading to a penalty chance for Burns on 28 minutes and the fly half made no mistake for the Cherry and Whites first points of the afternoon.

The Saints were quickly back on the front foot, turning down a kick at goal in favour of a kick to the corner, but Gloucester held out albeit under real pressure.

A penalty at the lineout then allowed Burns to make it 6-14 but failing to release the tackled player gave Lamb the chance to promptly respond in kind, and the former Kingsholm favourite made no mistake.

Half time came with the Saints leading 17-6 and worthy of their lead simply for their ability in the driving maul which was giving Gloucester issues.

The refereeing of the scrum was also causing the Kingsholm faithful to roar indignantly with the Saints front row seemingly to pop up on almost every occasion.

For all that, the onus was now on Gloucester to respond in the second half against an opponent who looked somewhere near the top of their game.

Gloucester came out kicking towards the JS Security Stand and ferocious work at the breakdown quickly resulted in a third penalty for Burns. It was a promising start.

It was a different looking Gloucester side and James Simpson-Daniel almost opened up the Saints with a sublime chip and catch. But Nigel Davies' team had to settle for a fourth penalty from Burns to make it 12-17.

But no sooner had Gloucester fought their way back into the match than great work by the Pisi brothers set up superb field position, and George Pisi finished off an overlap in the right-hand corner. Lamb again converted superbly for a 24-12 lead.

Gloucester started to use their replacements, but the catch and drive again worked for the visitors and led to another penalty chance, but Lamb wasted the opportunity to extend the lead.

As the game went into its final quarter, Burns very nearly went the length of the field as he picked off a Saints pass in his own 22, but was hauled down by the chasing defence.

Huia Edmonds was then denied a debut try after he latched on to a chip from Burns, the Australian hooker held up over the line. It was so near but yet so far for Gloucester.

Gloucester cranked up the pressure and Saints number eight G J van Velze was yellow carded as the defence creaked.

The Cherry and Whites opted to scrum, and reset followed reset as the Shed bayed for a penalty try and Paul Doran-Jones followed van Velze to the sin bin.

Mujati rejoined the fray, but to no avail, as referee Pearson eventually gave the penalty try and Burns' conversion made it 19-24 with eight minutes left to play.

Gloucester were now rampant with Knight, Kalamafoni and Savage carrying with real power and it was the Saints hanging on grimly.

The kitchen sink was thrown at the visitors and it looked to all intents and purposes as though they would crack.

Gloucester came close, oh so close. But, despite a massive final push, they couldn't quite find the key break or offload in a frantic finale and the visitors hung on.