

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2012

VICARAGE ROAD – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

GLOUCESTER JUST EDGED OUT AT SARACENS

SARACENS 28 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 23

A brave Gloucester effort came up just short at Vicarage Road as Saracens edged a close encounter by 28 points to 23. Despite scoring two tries to one from Saracens, seven penalties and a conversion from Charlie Hodgson won the day.

Gloucester have been in this situation before of course – coming away from a game where the boot of Charlie Hodgson has punished them severely.

For large parts of this game, Gloucester were the better team. Indeed, they led for large periods. However, 23 points from the boot of Hodgson proved to be too much to overcome.

Gloucester scored two tries to Saracens' one. However, they were massively inconvenienced by the loss of two players to the sin bin – Dan Murphy in the first half and Sione Kalamafoni in the second.

Even then, the Cherry and Whites looked to have held the home team at bay, only for Tim Wigglesworth to strike for the crucial try just as Kalamafoni was set to return to the field of play.

Gloucester were brave to the end as they fought to overcome the five point deficit. As time expired, they scrummaged five metres from the Saracens line.

Twice the scrum was dropped and twice the appeal went up for a penalty try. Nothing was given, and the decision went the way of the home team who loudly celebrated clinching the points.

It left Gloucester frustrated as they bade a not so fond farewell to Vicarage Road, which has not been a happy hunting ground in recent times. The one plus point being that the losing bonus point moves them back into fifth place in the table.

It had been billed as second against third in the Aviva Premiership table but, by the time the game kicked off, it was fourth against sixth after the other results over the weekend.

Billy Twelvetrees got things underway for Gloucester and quickly had a chance of points as Saracens were penalised for crossing. The stroke was confident and clean and Gloucester had an early 3-0 lead.

Five minutes later, from a near identical position, Twelvetrees duly made it 6-0 as Saracens failed to roll away from the tackle area only for Charlie Hodgson reply in kind shortly afterwards.

The action was pretty hectic at this point. Neither side really had the upper hand, and turnovers were hurting the attacking momentum of both.

The home side eventually got a break however when Twelvetrees' clearance kick was half charged down. Gloucester regrouped, but at the expense of a penalty, and Hodgson levelled the scores after 27 minutes.

Gloucester responded in slightly fortuitous style. Qera charged down Hodgson but Dan Murphy showed great poise to control the bobbling ball with his foot, pick up and score. Twelvetrees added a solid conversion for 13-6 on the half hour.

Murphy's joy was short-lived though as he was promptly brought back down to earth, yellow carded at the next breakdown for killing the ball.

Hodgson's third penalty made it 13-9 and Gloucester's undermanned pack were penalised at the next scrum, to allow the former England fly half to reduce the lead to 13-12.

It was a crucial few minutes for Gloucester but the 14 men held out until half time with a 13-12 lead.

It could have been even better. The Cherry and Whites won a kickable penalty with less than a minute remaining only for referee Davey to reverse the call for back chat.

It had been a real tussle in the first half, with neither side able to assert their superiority. The breakdown was messy and scoring chances few and far between.

Gloucester were looking solid but had not been able to pin back the home side in the tactical kicking game, and the passing game had not been its usual crisp self.

For all that, this game was certainly winnable if Gloucester could take it up a notch and also deny Saracens any cheap points.

A solid start was needed, but Gloucester were pinned deep from the restart and then conceded a penalty at the breakdown. Hodgson made no mistake to give his team a 15-13 lead.

Once more, the Gloucester response was impressive. Kalamafoni made a superb break to set up an ideal attacking position and Qera squeezed over in the corner after a strong carry from Tindall. Twelvetrees added a superb touchline conversion for 20-15.

This wasn't going to be easy though, and referee Davey was having a major say in matters as Sione Kalamafoni was yellow carded for not rolling away. Gloucester were down to 14 men for the second time.

The 14 men held out under real pressure, but only at the expense of a penalty, and Hodgson slotted his sixth of the afternoon with ease for 20-18.

The home side were really pressing now and Gloucester were hanging on for grim life. However, a kick downfield gave a counter attack opportunity, and Hodgson put Richard Wigglesworth over in the corner. Hodgson converted.

It was a blow for the Cherry and Whites who had been defending superbly. In all fairness though, the strain of playing with 14 men had finally allowed Saracens to get on top.

The home team had their tails up, and Tim Taylor had to produce a try saving tackle to prevent further damage. Rob Cook completed the rescue job with the turnover.

Twelvetrees gave Gloucester hope with a 69th minute penalty, but Hodgson was able to restore the five point gap as referee Davey pinged Tom Savage for blocking the chaser at the restart.

Gloucester mounted a furious late assault. Twice they kicked to the corner but were held out although Wigglesworth was sinbinned.

It all came down to a 5 metre scrum. Twice the home team were penalised, but no penalty try was forthcoming.

The third time, it was Gloucester who sinned in the eyes of the referee and Saracens held on, while Gloucester were left to ponder on what might have been.