

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2012

KINGSHOLM – AMLIN CHALLENGE CUP

**MONAHAN'S FOUR TRIES HIGHLIGHT GLOUCESTER'S ROUT
OF THE IRISH**

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 47 LONDON IRISH 3

Shane Monahan's four tries were the highlight as Gloucester Rugby put London Irish to the sword in round four of the Amlin Challenge Cup on Saturday, defeating the Exiles by 47 points to 3.

The six try romp sees Gloucester open up a seven point gap at the top of pool one and, with a trip to Bordeaux and home game against Mont de Marsan to come, progression to the knock out stages looks likely.

However, despite the one-sided score-line, this win wasn't all plain sailing.

Gloucester didn't really get into the game for 20 minutes or so as the visitors dominated possession, partly due to the Cherry and Whites turning the ball over frequently, such was their desire to play an open game.

With just six minutes to go before half time, Gloucester led by only six points to three as the Exiles hung on doggedly. However, two tries in those final six minutes swung the game decisively and Irish were a spent force thereafter.

The third try followed just after the break to seal the win, and it was then just a question of if and when Gloucester could clinch the try scoring bonus point.

Gloucester were rampant by the final whistle as the Exiles sought to keep the score respectable, but it was one way traffic in the last 20 minutes.

Nigel Davies and his squad will now look ahead to the return to Aviva Premiership action, and next week's visit of the Exeter Chiefs, in good spirits.

They can put Europe to one side for a few weeks, but will return to the Amlin Challenge Cup with everything to play for.

Both teams made late changes to their announced line-ups. Ben Morgan dropped out for Gloucester while Jonathan Joseph and Chris Hala'ufia were both unwell for Irish, and didn't travel.

The visitors enjoyed a bright opening and had the lion's share of possession in the opening minutes. However, Gloucester made their first attack count and Freddie Burns opened the scoring with a straightforward penalty.

The Exiles continued their positive start, and pinned Gloucester back for a while. The defence was solid enough, but only at the expense of a penalty, and Tom Homer had no difficulty levelling the scores after 12 minutes.

Homer had another penalty chance on 16 minutes but, for once, the sights on the siege gun boot were misaligned and the poorly struck kick swerved horribly wide.

Gloucester, for their part, hadn't really got going at this stage, and a number of handling errors were thwarting their efforts to gain some momentum as possession was frequently turned over.

The set piece was solid though, and this led to a long-range penalty opportunity for Burns on 24 minutes, the kick just having enough on it to put Gloucester back into the lead.

The Cherry and Whites were striving to get some width into their game. They turned a kickable penalty and very nearly created a scoring chance for Rob Cook, but the full back couldn't quite hold a difficult pass.

The first try wasn't long in coming though. Shane Monahan took a great angle after good carrying from Tindall and Kalamafoni, and sprinted home from 30 metres out. Burns added the conversion to make it 13-3.

Gloucester sensed a moment to press home their advantage. Cook was denied again by a knock on, but Burns added his third penalty for 16-3.

Time was almost up on the clock, but there was still time enough for Gloucester to score a beauty.

Kalamafoni received the restart, slipped a tackle and set off down the 5 metre channel. He timed his pass to perfection as the final man came across and Shane Monahan was home and hosed for his second.

Burns had a simple conversion to make the half time score 23-3, and Gloucester had blown this game wide open in the space of a few minutes.

The half time lead was a bit flattering perhaps, but Gloucester would gladly take the advantage into the break. A professional second half performance would surely clinch the points?

The visitors swapped their entire front row at half time, but it was the Gloucester pack who picked up where they left off, hammering away at the Irish line.

They didn't cross the whitewash, but Rob Cook did! Fielding a clearance near the Irish 10 metre line, he stepped a man at pace to break the defensive line and evaded the final man to score under the posts. Burns added the extras for 30-3.

Will James was yellow carded shortly afterwards for coming in at the side of a ruck, much to the displeasure of the home crowd, as Irish sought a way back into the game.

It wasn't immediately forthcoming, and Dan Robson, on for Jimmy Cowan, came close to securing the try-scoring bonus point but couldn't latch on to his own chip ahead which just ran dead in goal.

Gloucester kept their foot on the accelerator though, and Monahan duly completed his hat trick after a searing run from Sharples tore the Exiles' defence apart. Burns' conversion maintained his 100% goal kicking record.

Both teams had used virtually all their replacements by now, and the visitors sought a consolation but it was Monahan, adding his fourth, who was next to cross.

Dan Robson rubbed salt into the wounds as he sprinted home for a sixth Gloucester try to make the score 47-3 and, although there was a late flurry from the Exiles, Gloucester were in no mood to allow their line to be crossed.

JC