

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2012

WELFORD ROAD – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

GALLANT GLOUCESTER EFFORT COMES UP JUST SHORT AT TIGERS

LEICESTER TIGERS 17 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 12

A superb Gloucester effort pushed the Leicester Tigers all the way on their own patch. But Anthony Allen's try proved to be crucial as the home team shaded a close one, 17 points to 12.

It wasn't going to be a day for the faint hearted, and not a single Gloucester player let the shirt down.

The Cherry and Whites knew full well that the Tigers would be lying in wait, bristling with indignation at the defeat suffered at Kingsholm earlier in the season.

Richard Cockerill and his side were also looking to press their claims for a top two place, and were backed by a sell-out 24,000 crowd.

It's a venue from which very few sides leave with the points in the bag, yet Gloucester came so very close. Literally within inches of victory in fact, as they laid siege to the Tigers line with no time left on the clock.

There will be those, had Gloucester snatched the win, who will claim it would have been against the run of play.

To be fair, Nigel Davies's side were on the wrong side of the possession and territory equation. But, even though not at their best, they still made a game of it.

In boxing parlance, they were on the ropes at times and taking punch after punch. But Gloucester had the guts to drag themselves back into it and sent the fear of God through the Welford Road crowd as they threatened to snatch the win.

It wasn't to be, though. A turnover on the Tigers line snuffed out the final flicker of hope, and a losing bonus point was the reward for such a dogged effort.

Gloucester remain in fourth place in the table, and will welcome London Irish to Kingsholm next weekend as they seek to consolidate a play-off place.

Heavy rain had come down in the half hour before kick-off, but had thankfully relented a bit by the time the game kicked off.

A sublime kick off from Freddie Burns got the game underway, pinning the Tigers back within a few metres of their own line. However, a textbook lineout catch and kick got the home side out of trouble.

Leicester moved efficiently downfield, and earned a penalty at a ruck on the Gloucester 22. George Ford, in for the ill Toby Flood, had no trouble opening the scoring.

However, Freddie Burns quickly levelled the scores, as Brett Deacon was caught holding onto the ball in the tackle. The in-form fly half was on target from just inside the Tigers half.

One early concern for Gloucester was the scrum. Twice they were penalised in the first ten minutes, allowing the home side easy territorial gains.

The Cherry and Whites weren't helping themselves in the early stages. Ill-advised offloading near their own line almost led to a Leicester score, and Burns was half charged down in his own 22. They were nervy times, but Gloucester held.

A Burns kick then ran dead at the Tigers end. Gloucester were penalised at the subsequent scrum, earning a lecture from referee Small, but Ford's penalty was just off target.

Gloucester were then dealt a blow as Shaun Knight was yellow carded. It was for yet another scrummaging offence and looked to have been coming given the referee's stance.

So, when Burns gave Gloucester the lead a couple of minutes later with his second penalty, it came as something of a bonus in the circumstances.

Ford horribly miscued another attempt at goal, but the pressure was soon back on Gloucester, as Martyn Thomas marked a high ball but knocked on taking the quick tap.

It led to another series of scrums, which the undermanned Gloucester pack needed like a hole in the head. Several penalties followed but Gloucester again held firm.

The Welford Road crowd was getting restless and, when Ben Youngs was sinbinned for not rolling away, the atmosphere was distinctly hostile. Freddie Burns missed a chance to rub salt into the wound as his penalty attempt drifted wide.

Half time came with no further addition to the score, and Gloucester looked to have a bit of a spring in their step.

They'd spent much of the first half on the back foot, but were showing the grim determination that has characterised much of the season to date. Few friends were being won at Welford Road, but that was the least of Gloucester's concerns.

An almighty effort was going to be required in the second half, as a home fight back was bound to come. But Gloucester had shown stomach for the fight up to this point.

Predictably, it was all Tigers after the resumption as they sought to get back on terms. Again, it was all hands to the pump in defence for the Cherry and Whites.

However, a handling error in midfield gave Burns the chance to hack ahead. The fly half opted to gather the ball rather than kick ahead and was swallowed up by the cover.

George Ford killed the ball as he took one for the team and was promptly yellow carded. Burns kicked the penalty for 9-3.

However, Gloucester made a fatal error from the restart, trying to run the ball from deep. They coughed up possession and found themselves defending their own line.

The Cherry and Whites manfully kept the Tigers at bay around the fringes, until a long ball to the right gave Anthony Allen just enough space to squeeze in at the corner. Murphy couldn't convert, but it was now a 9-8 game with half an hour to go.

The crowd was back in the game, even more so when Will James became the fourth man sent to the sin bin for an offence at a rolling maul. Murphy's penalty made it 11-9 to the home side.

Burns had a chance to restore the lead from wide out but, amidst some ill-natured booing from the main stand not befitting of the knowledgeable home crowd, was just off target.

As George Ford lined up an easier attempt a couple of minutes later, Welford Road was as quiet as a church. Ford's kick found the target for 14-9.

There was still life in Gloucester, who soaked up yet more pressure before Burns kicked his fourth penalty to make it 14-12, only for Ford to add his third and widen the gap to 17-12.

Gloucester gave it everything, right up until the very last minute. Shane Monahan made a half break and Dan Robson almost made it to the line. But the Tigers defence just kept Gloucester at bay.

Even then, the pack forced a penalty out of the Tigers scrum as time expired, but turned the ball over on the line as the home team clung on for the win.

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