

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, MARCH 23, 2013**

**KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**GLOUCESTER LEAVE IT LATE TO TAKE THE POINTS  
AGAINST WELSH**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 15 LONDON WELSH 14**

A late Freddie Burns penalty, his fifth of the afternoon, was just enough for Gloucester to snatch a narrow 15-14 win over London Welsh at Kingsholm on Saturday afternoon.

It's a valuable four Aviva Premiership points earned for Gloucester, but they were certainly earned the hard way.

The Cherry and Whites trailed for long periods against a London Welsh side who, belying their position in the league table, played like men inspired.

In fact, it was only when Freddie Burns slotted a 75th minute penalty, that Gloucester edged their way back in front to finally kill off the spirited challenge.

Until that moment, it looked very much as though the visitors were going to breathe genuine life into their battle against relegation as they led 14-6 at one point with Gloucester very much out of sorts.

Lyn Jones' side didn't do anything fancy. Their defensive line speed and tackling were first rate and they took full advantage of their rare forays into Gloucester territory.

One of these, which resulted in a try for wing Phil Mackenzie, sent a real chill around Kingsholm, even allowing for the cold weather. But it wouldn't quite be enough.

Gloucester kept plugging away through the boot of Burns, and the feeling grew that the Exiles were starting to hang on for dear life.

Twice, with Gloucester trailing 14-12, Dan Robson so nearly made the line in the final 15 minutes, only to come up inches short.

It was all hands to the pumps in defence, and the visitors finally resorted to keeping Gloucester out illegally. Cometh the hour, cometh the man and Burns slotted the penalty kick that clinched the win.

It was harsh on the visitors who probably deserved better, and it was with a huge sigh of relief, that Gloucester left the field.

The top-four aspirations are still very much alive, but a much-improved performance will be required against Harlequins next Friday.

Coming into the game, both teams were hit by late withdrawals. Nick Wood and Gavin Henson were ruled out, and Dan Murphy and Gordon Ross respectively replaced them.

After three weeks off for both teams, the opening exchanges were understandably scrappy with errors from both teams on a cold afternoon at Kingsholm.

Gloucester struck first. Powerful driving in and around the fringes took play into the London Welsh 22, where the ball was killed. Freddie Burns had an easy first kick of the afternoon and made no mistake.

Gloucester's momentum was adversely affected by a few set-piece hiccups, and Gordon Ross levelled the scores after 13 minutes when Peter Buxton was adjudged not to have released the tackled player before competing for the ball.

The opening quarter passed by without too much else happening. A chip and catch from Freddie Burns lifted the crowd, but neither side had the upper hand or was threatening in attack.

Gloucester were showing the greater ambition, but the visitors took a 25th minute lead, somewhat against the run of play, when Gordon Ross landed a long range penalty awarded for holding on in the tackle.

It just wasn't happening for the Cherry and Whites at this point. Burns was just off target with a penalty attempt from out wide, and handling errors continued to haunt Nigel Davies' side.

Even when they did pin the visitors back near their own line, following a neat grubber down the line from Sharples, London Welsh were able to efficiently move their way out of danger.

And, when Gloucester tried to put some width on the ball, the visitors' line speed and tigerish tackling were frustrating the attacking intent.

However, just as it looked as though it would be 6-3 at half time, more powerful carrying around the fringes earned Burns another straightforward shot at goal and the fly half duly levelled the scores.

It had been a first half for the purists. London Welsh were fighting for everything and frustrating Gloucester who, for their part, were probably trying a little bit too hard to make something happen.

The one factor that would give the Kingsholm faithful cause for hope, was that Gloucester would have the wind at their back in the second half. Hopefully, this would help the territorial battle and give the home team a platform to build on.

The visitors started well, keeping possession patiently and tight head prop James Tideswell almost broke clear from a ruck.

Gloucester scrambled back, but there was a chance on the right which was quickly thwarted by Jonny May's deliberate knock on. May saw yellow and Ross made it 9-6 with the penalty.

Gloucester promptly made changes, sending Tom Savage and Akapusi Qera into the fray. A driving maul produced a penalty, but Burns missed the kick at goal.

The home crowd were then stunned as prop Tideswell made another key break. Freddie Burns just hauled him down, but the offload found Phil McKenzie who scored the game's opening try for a 14-6 lead.

It was a massive swing in fortunes and Gloucester were going to need some real composure to get themselves out of this fix.

A late tackle on Gordon Ross then gifted the visitors field position, and a penalty at the following lineout gave Ross a chance to extend the lead, but the former Scotland international sliced his kick. It would prove to be a crucial miss.

The home side hit back as Rob Cook and Jonny May made the most of some room down the left flank to stretch the visitors. The ball was killed and Burns' third penalty made it 9-14 with 18 minutes left to play.

It wasn't quite desperation stakes for Gloucester, but it wasn't far off and the tension grew despite Burns narrowing the gap to 12-14 with his fourth penalty. Another slipped past the posts with 8 minutes left to prolong the agony.

Gloucester weren't at their best, but they refused to throw in the towel. The final ten minutes were virtually all spent in the visitors' 22 as the Cherry and Whites threw everything at them.

In the end, it came to a good old-fashioned shove at scrum time. Head on to the posts, the Gloucester eight produced their scrum of the season and the Welsh pack folded.

Burns' penalty bisected the posts to the relief of the Kingsholm crowd, and was a dagger to the heart of the London Welsh side.