

# GLOUCESTER RUGBY

THURSDAY, APRIL 4, 2013

KINGSHOLM – AMLIN CHALLENGE CUP

GALLANT GLOUCESTER UNDONE BY CLINICAL BIARRITZ  
PERFORMANCE

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 31 BIARRITZ OLYMPIC PAYS BASQUE 41

Playing for the first time at this level for four seasons, Gloucester produced a spirited effort against the current Amlin Challenge Cup holders, Biarritz, but paid a high price for indiscipline and errors, going down 31-41 at Kingsholm on Thursday evening.

Nigel Davies' side were more than competitive against their French opponents, but were beaten by a side who were possibly more streetwise, having competed in this type of knockout match so frequently over the past few seasons.

Indeed, Gloucester started the better of the two sides and were good value for an early lead after a fine try from Mike Tindall.

However, the first half sin-binnings of Dario Chistolini and Koree Britton gave the French visitors a weakness to exploit and they needed no second invitation.

Chasing the game in the second half, Gloucester threw caution to the wind as they sought to keep their European hopes alive, but came up against a well organised defence in no mood to concede, and a side able to ruthlessly exploit any opportunity.

The killer blow came on 56 minutes. Trailing by ten points, Sione Kalamafoni powered close to the Biarritz line. Gloucester poured forward looking for a key score.

However, possession was conceded and the French side countered upfield to score through Benoit Baby. It was a brutal 17 point swing.

Gloucester have become renowned for their fighting spirit, though, and refused to throw in the towel. Late scores from Monahan and Edmonds were testimony to that and allowed Gloucester to finish with their heads held high.

It's the first time Gloucester have competed in a European semi-final for four seasons. Many of their younger players haven't experienced this. In the fullness of time, they will benefit from this and come back all the stronger.

For now, it's about regrouping, refocusing on the Aviva Premiership and aiming for as strong a finish as possible.

Gloucester were hit by two late withdrawals. Shaun Knight failed to recover in time from a knee injury and was replaced by Dario Chistolini. Meanwhile, amongst the replacements, Rob Cook came in for Billy Twelvetrees.

Gloucester started brightly. Right from the opening kick-off, the ball was moved from the home 22 with Henry Trinder producing a powerful run. A sizeable crowd roared its approval.

Trinder and Sharples linked well again to maintain the momentum and a hack through from Koree Britton caused alarm bells to ring in the Biarritz defence.

However, a penalty from Burns was the only reward and this was swiftly cancelled out by an opportunistic drop goal from Damien Traille.

Gloucester stuck at it, though. The forwards made inroads with a good catch and drive, before Freddie Burns' long floated pass found Mike Tindall who touched down in the corner for the game's first try. 8-3 after 14 minutes.

It was a good start, but the crowd were stunned on 18 minutes when Dario Chistolini was yellow carded, apparently for tackling a man without the ball. Dimitri Yachvili took full advantage by kicking the penalty.

Biarritz then showed their class. A high ball from Burns drifted too far and was easy counter attack ball for Bosch. Ngwenya made a half break and found Teddy Thomas outside him, who sprinted home down the left flank. Yachvili slotted a superb conversion.

Gloucester, to their credit, weren't fazed and hit straight back with a Burns penalty after Sharples was blocked from chasing his own kick ahead.

One slight area of concern for Gloucester as the half hour mark approached, was the lineout.

They were having to work hard to secure their own ball and this frustration was probably instrumental in Koree Britton tackling Yachvili when the scrum half was fractionally off the ground. The yellow card again reduced Gloucester to 14 men.

Biarritz promptly launched a punishing, energy sapping maul. It was halted just short of the line, but Yachvili's delicate chip found Thomas who just had to catch and ground the ball. Yachvili again converted superbly to open up a 20-11 lead.

The home crowd were justifiably feeling hard done by in terms of the decision making and, when referee Lacey was forced to limp off shortly afterwards, the cheering was significant.

The new man with the whistle, Dudley Phillips, penalised Biarritz for not rolling away soon after his arrival, to huge acclaim from the Kingsholm crowd, and Burns added the penalty.

The pressure was soon back on Gloucester. Lewis' pass flew over Burns' head and, although the fly half gathered to clear, the ball had been taken back into the 22 so play came back.

Biarritz were nothing if not predictable. The rolling maul was working, so they went back to it again, and hooker Arnaud Heguy claimed the try. Yachvili converted again and the lead was an ominous 27-14.

Gloucester held until half time and were left to contemplate how to work their way back into this.

They hadn't played that badly. In fact, some of the opening play was top notch. But they had paid dearly for only playing 20 minutes of the first half with a full complement of players.

In clinical fashion, Biarritz had gleefully exploited the superiority in numbers up front courtesy of their well drilled rolling maul.

Gloucester's ability with ball in hand gave cause for hope in the second half, as did the fact that the wind would now be at their backs. However, the discipline would have to be better.

Biarritz obviously had their tails up and nearly started the second half in style. Ngwenya chipped and re-gathered, but a fine cover tackle from Lewis bundled him into touch a few metres short.

Discipline continued to dog Gloucester. Chistolini got in front of Burns as he kicked downfield and was ruled offside, but Yachvili was, for once, off target with the penalty.

Burns made no such mistake a few minutes later, when Biarritz went straight to ground. His penalty gave Gloucester hope at 17-27 with half an hour left to play but he was off target on 54 minutes.

Gloucester were then caught with a real sucker punch. Kalamafoni produced a superb run to get Gloucester to within metres of the line.

However, the ball was turned over in the phases that followed and Biarritz countered.

Ngwenya got the ball in space on the right and had too much pace for the cover, before finding Benoit Baby on an inside supporting line and the centre coasted home. Yachvili's conversion made it 17-34.

A close range try for Seramaia Burotu seemed to rub salt into the wounds, but Gloucester weren't about to roll over.

A purple patch of play as time ticked away saw Shane Monahan fight his way to the line, and then Huia Edmonds finish off a nice move down the right.

They were consolation scores but they hinted at what might have been.

Credit to Biarritz. They were slick, clinical, hard-working and worthy of their win. They are the current Amlin Challenge Cup holders and they defended their trophy in some style this evening.

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