

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2013**

**KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**TMO DECISIONS COST GLOUCESTER DEAR  
IN NARROW DEFEAT TO SALE**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 16 SALE SHARKS 22**

Gloucester slipped to a 22-16 home defeat at the hands of the Sale Sharks on Saturday, two controversial TMO decisions going against the Cherry and Whites and proving to be the difference.

Those key decisions, particularly the second which saw Sale open up a 19-3 lead, were hugely important.

However, in hindsight, Gloucester just didn't exert enough control on the game and paid the price despite piling on the pressure in the final stages.

They were knocked out of their stride by Sale's performance, and just couldn't get into the game until the latter stages.

It was a day when little went right, and those crucial 50/50 decisions and events certainly went the way of the Sharks. Gloucester battled on despite losing two men to the sinbin to Sale's one and, of course, having all the key TMO calls go against them.

In reality though, had Nigel Davies' side snatched the late win, it would probably have been unfair on the visitors, who played the conditions well in the first half and then defended their lead with real passion.

Gloucester clawed their way back into the game in the final quarter, and a remarkable comeback looked as though it may be on the cards.

But Sale were just streetwise enough in the final stages, and survived a five metre scrum on their own line as time expired to clinch the points.

It all adds up to a disappointing start to the season for Gloucester, who will spend many hours this week analysing where they went wrong ahead of Sunday's trip to Saracens.

Gloucester actually started the game mixing up their game cleverly. Ambition with ball in hand was combined with some nice tactical kicking by Freddie Burns as they probed for an opening.

The first points though went Sale's way. Rob Cook had a kick charged down deep in his own half, and Gloucester were penalised at a subsequent ruck. Nick MacLeod's penalty opened the scoring after eight minutes.

Kingsholm was then stunned as Sale unleashed a slick backs move. Dwayne Peel worked the loop and scampered through, before finding Mark Cueto who exploited the extra man to touch down. The pass looked forward but was given after a ruling from the TMO.

Gloucester needed to settle, and finally did so thanks to a 19th minute penalty from Freddie Burns, which helped settle the nerves after a tense few minutes, but the fly-half was just off target with a second attempt a minute later.

Sale were certainly making life difficult for Gloucester, combining tenacious work at the breakdown with a well-executed kicking game. The Cherry and Whites were yet to really get going.

As the half hour approached, the Kingsholm crowd were growing increasingly exasperated at the refereeing, forward passes and lazy running escaping penalty and, when Gloucester finally got a decision, Burns' penalty held up in the wind and drifted wide.

However, with the wind at his back, Sale full back Tom Arscott made no mistake on 35 minutes from several metres inside his own half to extend the lead to 11-3.

The scrums were a complete mess at this point, and Nick Wood was yellow carded on 37 minutes to add to Gloucester's woes. Arscott rubbed salt into the wound with another long-range penalty.

It had been a difficult half for Gloucester, and there was everything to do in the second half.

Nigel Davies' side would have to tighten up at the set piece. They were down to seven men in the scrum already, and several pieces of lineout possession had been lost. Gloucester would at least play with the wind at their backs after the interval, but a platform had to be created to launch the dangerous strike runners.

As things stood, Sale were easily handling the likes of Kalamafoni and Morgan when they took the ball at first receiver, holding them up off the ground and winning the turnover.

The second half got off to a similarly troubled start. Burns put a kick out on the full, Gloucester went in at the side of a Sale maul, but MacLeod was off target with his penalty attempt.

Charlie Sharples had been starved of possession up to this point, but lifted the crowd with a weaving run which set up a great position only for Kalamafoni to knock on in contact.

Controversy then hit Kingsholm again and, once more, it was a refereeing decision at the centre of things.

Tom Arscott threaded a kick through the home defence and centre Andy Forsyth looked to be at least a yard offside when he ran on to score. However, the TMO again saw nothing wrong. 19-3 to the Sharks after 52 minutes.

When referee Small then again went to the TMO two minutes later, and Billy Twelvetrees was yellow carded for a tip tackle, Gloucester were entitled to think the world was against them.

Finally, Gloucester clicked in attack. A penalty took them into the Sale 22, and the forwards set up good field position.

Suddenly Henry Trinder popped up at first receiver, burst through the defensive line and sprinted over. Burns added the conversion to give Gloucester hope at 10-19 on the hour.

When Burns added a penalty on 64 minutes to get Gloucester back within a score, and with Twelvetrees returning from the sinbin, the comeback was on and the gap was down to three points on 67 minutes as Burns slotted another penalty.

It had been a good spell for the Cherry and Whites but the Sharks steadied the ship with a 69th minute drop goal from Joe Ford to make it 16-22.

Predictably, and understandably, the visitors tried to slow things down and wind down the clock to the frustration of the Kingsholm crowd.

Even as the game went into the final couple of minutes, Gloucester went for it. Rob Cook broke superbly from his own 22 and took play into the Sale 22, where replacement prop Ross Harrison was sinbinned.

Sale gambled by replacing full back Tom Arscott as they sent on Eifion Lewis-Roberts to shore up their scrum, and it paid off as they forced a penalty to bring the game to a close.