

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2013

KINGSTON PARK – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP

**GLOUCESTER BATTLE TO HARD FOUGHT WIN IN NORTH EAST
OVER FALCONS**

NEWCASTLE FALCONS 16 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 22

It's a game of inches sometimes, and Gloucester just held the Newcastle Falcons at bay in the final moments of the match at Kingston Park to clinch a rare win in the North East by 22 points to 16.

It wasn't pretty at times, but Gloucester dug deep after a less than perfect start to close out a valuable win on the road, the Cherry and Whites first away at Newcastle since December 23rd 2007.

Nigel Davies' side had to overcome an early 10 point deficit, tricky weather conditions with a swirling wind that made kicking difficult and wasting several really good try scoring opportunities.

A number of scoring chances went begging in the final quarter, and that kept the home side in the hunt. In fact, they spent the final two minutes camped within metres of the Gloucester line, looking for a memorable winning contribution.

However, Gloucester's defence stiffened just at the best possible moment. Time and again, a Cherry and White defender cut down a Falcons attacker and referee Andrew Small finally blew for time with the home side held up over the line.

It was an important win, the second in a row for Gloucester, and it sets up nicely next weekend's West County clash with the Exeter Chiefs.

Gloucester came to Kingston Park, looking to end their recent Newcastle hoodoo. However, they couldn't have got off to a worse possible start.

The Falcons worked a neat move down the blindside channel, Mike Blair putting Will Welch marauding through a gap. The overlap was on and Ally Hogg's pass saw Tom Catterick sprint over in the corner. Clegg added the conversion.

The home side had scored their first try of the season, with Gloucester barely having touched the ball. When Dan Murphy limped off injured shortly afterwards, the task got that much harder.

It was a lively start from the home side, and an incisive break from Adam Powell very nearly opened up Gloucester again, but a possible scoring pass didn't quite go to hand.

The Cherry and Whites tried to get going in attack, but the Falcons defence was proving a tough nut to crack, and the home side extended the lead on 18 minutes when the Gloucester scrum was penalised and Clegg slotted the penalty.

Gloucester finally got the scoreboard ticking a couple of minutes later, when Burns punished a Falcons indiscretion at the breakdown with a penalty of his own.

The home side were quick to turn the screw. A couple of energy sapping catch and drives took them into kicking range, Gloucester pulled down the maul and Clegg made it 13-3 after 28 minutes.

With his knowledge of local conditions, Clegg was kicking beautifully, whereas Burns' effort a minute later looked good but was blown off target by the wind.

Finally, though, as Gloucester got some continuity into their game a try followed. Patient interplay got them to within metres of the Falcons line and Ben Morgan's slick pass to Rob Cook saw the full back squeeze in at the corner.

These were more promising moments for Gloucester, and more patient build-up play saw Morgan almost smash his way through for a memorable score only to lose the ball in contact.

The half came to an end with Gloucester pressing, but the home side edging it on the scoreboard by 13 points to 8.

Nigel Davies' side, after a difficult opening quarter, had finished the half well, but were coming up against a dogged and determined opponent.

There were signs of the Falcons beginning to flag slightly in defence, but the half time break may well have come at an ideal time for them to regroup.

The home side did seem to have an edge in the tight, so Gloucester needed a big effort up front and they needed to prevent Clegg getting a chance to kick for goal.

It was a bright start as Gloucester pinned the home side back deep in their own 22, forcing the Falcons off their own ball at a set scrum and opting to kick for the corner.

It was a big moment in the game, and Newcastle just held out, but at the expense of a penalty, and Freddie Burns had an easy kick for 13-11.

Gloucester quickly found themselves in the same position, and again the Falcons held in the tight, forcing back the catch and drive.

However, Gloucester swiftly moved the ball out wide and Henry Trinder put Jonny May over in the corner. Gloucester had edged their way into a 16-13 lead.

That advantage was short-lived, however, as the Falcons muscled their way back into the Gloucester 22, forced a penalty and Phil Godman did the rest to level the scores after 59 minutes.

The tension could be felt in all corners of Kingston Park, and the pressure was certainly on Freddie Burns as he lined up a 66th minute penalty, but the fly half kept his cool to restore the lead at 19-16.

Gloucester pushed for the killer score. Both Gareth Evans and James Simpson-Daniel were tackled into touch just short but the line remained intact and Newcastle survived.

Catterick was off target with a long-range penalty to the frustration of the home crowd, but Burns held his nerve again to extend the lead to 22-16 with a tricky effort from out wide with four minutes to play.

A sensational break from Matt Kvesic, featuring two outrageous dummies, almost finished in another decisive score but the final pass went astray and, almost immediately, Gloucester were back under pressure.

The home crowd screamed for the winning score, but Gloucester refused to buckle and when referee Small blew for time to bring a fascinating encounter to a close, it was a small but vocal travelling Gloucester contingent who were celebrating.

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