

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2013**

**KINGSHOLM – HEINEKEN CUP**

**MAGNIFICENT GLOUCESTER PIP PERPIGNAN  
TO TAKE HEINEKEN HONOURS**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 27 PERPIGNAN 22**

Gloucester overcame a dreadful start to produce a superb second half fightback and defeat Perpignan 27-22 in the Heineken Cup at Kingsholm on Saturday evening.

Gloucester were dealt a number of blows before the action really got going. Freddie Burns was a late withdrawal due to illness, forcing a reshuffle in the backs and Rupert Harden also dropped out due to injury.

Then came the shock of conceding a sensational score within the first 60 seconds. Considering morale may have been low after the home defeat to Exeter last weekend, what followed was sensational.

Gloucester had to strain every sinew in the pursuit of victory. This was no easy opponent to overcome. And, so many marginal calls went against Gloucester, it was impressive that heads didn't drop.

The Cherry and Whites came so close to a couple of first half tries, and then saw one ruled out by a TMO ruling with just ten minutes to go.

But Nigel Davies' side weren't to be denied and Jonny May's try was pivotal in writing another small chapter in the club's fine European history.

The evening got off to an emotional start as Olly Morgan, who announced his retirement this week, led the team out. Everyone at Kingsholm gave him an appropriately rapturous reception.

But it was Perpignan who got off to a flyer. Fly half Lopez slid a crafty kick in behind the defensive line, wing Wandile Mjekevu gathered and flicked inside in one movement and James Hook was over. The full back converted his own try from the touchline.

It was a superbly engineered try, but a real kick in the teeth so early for Gloucester, who then had to be on their toes defensively after a fine offload from former Kingsholm favourite Alasdair Strokosch sent hooker Guirado scurrying into the 22.

It was a tough opening few minutes for Gloucester. But they gained good territory from a fine Twelvetrees kick. Perpignan conceded a penalty and Twelvetrees bisected the posts for 3-7.

A good spell for Gloucester ensued with Kalamafoni rampaging into the Perpignan 22. Gloucester were bold enough to try a kick for the corner, but were held out and settled for a second Twelvetrees penalty. However, as the game went into its second quarter, Hook restored the four point advantage at 6-10, as Gloucester went off their feet at a ruck.

The French side controlled possession for the next few minutes and, in doing so, took the steam out of the Gloucester fightback. The game was still very much in the balance though.

As half time approached, Perpignan piled on the pressure and tried to turn the screw. A rolling maul resulted in a penalty opportunity from wide out, and Hook made no mistake for 6-13.

There was still time for Gloucester to show some defiance. James Hudson took a flat pass to break the line, and Huia Edmonds took it on. Twelvetrees slid a grubber through for Jonny May, but the winger was held up over the line.

The ensuing scrum resulted in a free kick, and Jimmy Cowan tapped and went for the line. Referee Leighton Hodges called for the TMO, and the decision was that the grounding was just short. So, another Twelvetrees penalty was the outcome.

At 9-13 down, Gloucester were still very much in this. They'd overcome the body blow of conceding a superb first minutes' score, and gone toe to toe with the French big spenders ever since.

A moment of inspiration, a stroke of luck or simply some reward for sheer hard graft could see this one go Gloucester's way.

The Cherry and Whites certainly came out looking like they meant business, as the pack took it to their French counterparts. The pressure saw scrum half Durand yellow carded for a high tackle but no points.

That soon changed. Lopez, in the unfamiliar role of scrum half, was penalised for feeding the scrum. Cowan tapped again, and this time there was no stopping him. Twelvetrees' conversion made it 16-13.

The narrow lead was short-lived. Gloucester came in at the side of a maul, and James Hook showed excellent concentration to slot a tricky penalty and level the scores.

Matt Kvesic then took one for the team. An interception saw the visitors move dangerously downfield, and the flanker went off his feet in an attempt to slow up possession. A yellow card followed, as did another Hook penalty.

Still a man light, Gloucester started to creak in the scrum a little, and this allowed Perpignan to move downfield and set up a position from which Hook dropped an excellent goal.

With the game moving into the final quarter, Gloucester trailed by six points at 16-22, but were giving it everything to try and get back on terms.

This was shown as the home pack produced their best scrum of the night to force a 65th minute penalty and Twelvetrees made it a three point game.

Drama then struck on 70 minutes as Akapusi Qera sent Jonny May screaming down the 5m channel for what looked like a superb score. However, the TMO was again called into action and he spotted a forward pass to enrage Kingsholm.

Gloucester weren't to be denied, though. The pack went about their business, inching forward metre by metre before releasing the backs. Ryan Mills slipped a beautiful pass to Jonny May, and the winger was clear for the try.

Twelvetrees conversion slid past the post but, before he could kick, Perpignan centre Lifeimi Mafi was red carded for a tip tackle.

With fewer than five minutes remaining, it was a two point game and the nerve endings were jangling.

Once more, the pack fronted up and forced a crucial penalty. Up stepped Twelvetrees, and he held his nerve to extend the lead to 27-22. Referee Hodges blew his whistle for the final time and the win was clinched.

Next up are Munster, and a tough trip to Limerick lies in wait for Gloucester. The Irish province slipped to defeat against Edinburgh today so will be looking to get their campaign off and running.

If Gloucester front up like they did today, anything is possible.

JC