

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2013

RECREATION GROUND – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

DOGGED GLOUCESTER EDGED OUT 15-13 BY BATH AT THE REC

BATH RUGBY 15 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 13

Gloucester Rugby travelled to the Rec on Friday evening for Round 6 of the Aviva Premiership, and it went to the wire with Bath edging a tense 15-13 win.

It was a typically committed local derby, with both teams leaving nothing in the tank – as you'd expect.

Gloucester battled bravely and almost snatched an unlikely victory at the death, but the boot of George Ford just kept the Cherry and Whites at bay as his five penalties secured the win.

Ford had a mixed game. He succeeded with five kicks at goal from nine attempts. However, he put the ball dead on several occasions and was responsible for Gloucester's score.

However, he had the luxury of his pack providing a source of good ball and winning him those chances to kick for points.

Gloucester scored the only try, courtesy of a piece of Freddie Burns opportunism, as he charged down a kick and gathered to score. However, it was a rare positive moment on the night.

It got Gloucester back to within two points, and a real smash and grab looked on the cards but, despite a late rally, the Cherry and Whites just couldn't manoeuvre themselves into a position to win the game.

Following the game, a disappointed Director of Rugby, Nigel Davies, pinpointed Gloucester's indiscipline as the main reason for defeat and the penalty count certainly backed him up.

What was present was a fortitude and determination not to throw in the towel, which kept Gloucester in the game. Commitment and defence couldn't be faulted.

However, Gloucester were largely living on scraps of possession, trailed throughout on the scoreboard and were chasing the game in unhelpful conditions.

A losing bonus point is not to be sniffed at, but Gloucester will be bitterly disappointed at the performance and outcome and will have to play a cleaner game next weekend against Wasps at Kingsholm if they are to get back to winning ways.

With rain teeming down from 20 minutes before kick-off, it was understandably cat and mouse in the early stages. George Ford played the conditions and produced a couple of neat kicks to touch to pin Gloucester back.

The Cherry and Whites escaped as they overthrew a lineout from near their own line, Bath knocking on in contact, but a late hit on George Ford resulted in an easy penalty opportunity and the Bath fly half made it 3-0 after six minutes.

It was mostly Bath in these opening exchanges, with Stringer and Ford pulling the strings from half back. The conditions were continuing to be a challenge and a tight game looked to be on the cards.

It was a crooked feed at scrum time that led to the next spell of pressure from the home side, but the Gloucester defence stood up to the onslaught and gratefully swallowed up a loose pass to clear their lines.

Nigel Davies' side finally moved into the Bath 22 as a strong run from Sione Kalamafoni got his side over the gain line, but Freddie Burns' flat pass to Jonny May arrived at the same time as Matt Banahan and the ball was lost forward.

An overthrown Bath lineout, deep in their own 22, then gave Gloucester a real chance as Dan Murphy gathered and was brought down just a metre or so short. But a Bath boot kicked the ball out of the ruck and the fleeting chance was gone.

The home team breathed a sigh of relief and moved downfield, their pack then forcing a penalty at a Gloucester scrum, which Ford slotted for a 6-0 Bath lead after 28 minutes, quickly followed by a third penalty on 32 minutes.

9-0 was a decent lead for Bath in the conditions, and the penalty count was starting to become a cause for concern for Gloucester.

However, they finally got a decision as Bath were penalised for a deliberate knock on, and Freddie Burns opened Gloucester's account with a well struck penalty.

Ford was off target with a penalty effort from out wide as Bath were immediately presented with another chance of points, and then pushed a near identical effort wide right of the posts on the stroke of half time.

Bath could feel reasonably content with a 9-3 lead at half time, and were probably good value for it, given their advantage in both the possession and territory stakes.

However, Gloucester were definitely still in this game. It was a real arm wrestle; a slog at times. But there wasn't that much between the two sides.

The half time team talk would probably focus on retaining the ball better in possession and cutting down on the penalties. If Gloucester could do that, they'd be in with a shout.

However, indiscipline continued to haunt the Cherry and Whites. An off the ball tackle was followed by another penalty at scrum time and Ford's fourth successful penalty made it 12-3.

The home side had their tails up, and their pack in particular were starting to gain an ascendancy up front, with their catch and drive working well.

Bath hammered away at the line for what seemed like an eternity, trying catch and drives and 5 metre scrums. Gloucester held, but only at the expense of a yellow card for Rupert Harden.

It looked a harsh call, but Gloucester had conceded a series of penalties in close succession. Ford dragged his penalty wide left of the uprights, while Burns hit the post with a long range effort a couple of minutes later.

Things looked grim, but Gloucester then got a huge break. Freddie Burns charged down an attempted clearance from George Ford, gathered and dived over for the game's first try. He then converted to get Gloucester right back into it at 12-10 with 18 minutes left to play.

Bath were rattled and put the following kick off out on the full. But they quickly had a chance to settle their nerves as Gloucester indiscipline again resurfaced and Ford added his fifth penalty.

Burns promptly pegged the lead back to 15-13 with a superb penalty strike from out wide to set up a tense final 10 minutes.

Bath tried to keep it tight to run down the clock, and Ford was off target with another penalty attempt on 77 minutes as the drama increased.

Gloucester had a sniff of a chance to run the ball as the countdown clock ticked inexorably towards zero but, in the conditions, long range attacks were doomed to failure and a losing bonus point was the only reward.