

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2013

KINGSHOLM – LV= CUP

INJURIES MAR GLOUCESTER'S LV= CUP WIN OVER FALCONS

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 20 NEWCASTLE FALCONS 3

Gloucester Rugby had to overcome first half injuries to Ryan Mills and James Simpson-Daniel, before wearing down a hard-working Newcastle Falcons side to clinch their first LV= Cup win of the season by 20 points to 3.

It's a win that may come at a high cost though for Gloucester with both Ryan Mills and James Simpson-Daniel leaving the field on stretches with what appeared to be lower leg injuries.

It took the gloss off a workmanlike performance which saw the Cherry and Whites secure their first LV= Cup points of the season.

In the circumstances, the way Gloucester regrouped after the setbacks was to be admired, particularly defensively, as they simply refused to allow the Falcons to cross their line.

Mike Tindall, who was named Man of the Match by the 1873 Club Members, led the way, both in attack and in defence, and inspired the young charges around him.

It wasn't an especially pretty win, there were simply too many stoppages and interruptions throughout the whole game that stopped any form of flow to the game.

In the final outcome, however, a try in each half were more than enough for Gloucester to take the points despite the best efforts of a Falcons side who battled hard but didn't threaten overmuch.

Next week sees Aviva Premiership action return, at Harlequins, and everyone at Gloucester will know that there will be a huge step up in intensity from today's encounter.

Both teams will welcome back their England absentees, and a tough encounter looks to be on the cards.

Gloucester were even forced into a late reshuffle before the game. Jonny May was taken ill overnight. Martyn Thomas moved on to the wing to replace him, and Rob Cook came in at full back.

Under the floodlights at Kingsholm, the Falcons were sporting an unfamiliar green strip as Gloucester started the game with some ambition, looking to move the ball wide whenever possible.

One bullocking run from Mike Tindall set the tone and led to the first score. He got over the gain line and the Falcons were scrambling. Ryan Mills drifted to draw the defence, and Rob Cook took a great angle to shred the defence and score. Freddie Burns converted for an early 7-0 lead.

Tindall, playing his third game in a week, was all over the pitch in the opening exchanges, hacking a loose ball ahead into the Newcastle 22 only for an unkind bounce to end the threat, then racing back into his own 22 to cover a kick through.

The centre had to carry back over his line, leading to a spell of pressure from the visitors. Gloucester were penalised at a scrum and Rory Clegg was on target with the penalty.

The Cherry and Whites were looking good in most aspects of the game, but referee Morris was finding fault with the home scrummage and several penalties were hurting the home side.

Gloucester were quickly back on the offensive, but dealt a blow when Ryan Mills was stretchered off the field after 22 minutes.

Gloucester's wretched luck then continued as James Simpson-Daniel took the ball into contact and never got back up. Again the medics were called for, and the crowd favourite was carried off to sympathetic applause.

A rapidly reshuffled back line now included Billy Burns and Steph Reynolds. With less than half an hour played, the rest of the game was going to be a real challenge, but Freddie Burns made it 10-3 with a well struck penalty on 31 minutes.

It was a somewhat sombre atmosphere at Kingsholm now following the two injuries, but the crowd were slowly starting to despair at some of referee Morris' decisions, especially when he sinbinned Shaun Knight and Rob Vickers.

It was the last meaningful action of a half, which had been eventful if nothing else. Gloucester as usual looked dangerous with ball in hand, but the re-jigged back line was now up against it.

The refereeing of the set piece was also confusing nearly everyone present, and coming out on top in this area was going to go a long way to determining the overall winner.

The second half began well for Gloucester. Cox and Edmonds both carried powerfully, before the Falcons were pinged for not rolling away from a double tackle on Rob Cook. Freddie Burns punished them by kicking the penalty for 13-3.

It was still nip and tuck at this stage. Neither side could really gain the upper hand, and the atmosphere was still understandably muted despite a great turn out on the night from the Gloucester faithful.

Dan George and Will James were sent on from the bench to boost the forward resources, and the latter carried powerfully to create a penalty chance for Burns, which glanced the left upright and went wide as the hour mark approached.

The game needed a spark and it came from Mike Tindall after a sweeping backs move took play into the Falcons half. Possession was actually lost, but Tindall charged down the clearance to re-gather and score. Burns added the conversion.

Gloucester spent much of the final 15 minutes camped in the Newcastle 22, trying to extend their lead. However, they ran into a determined Falcons defence and no further scores followed.

There was a late flurry from the visitors who sought a consolation to take back north with them, but they were denied even that crumb of comfort by a resolute Gloucester defence.

The Kingsholm faithful drifted off into the night, with mixed feelings very much the order of the day – delight at the win but genuine concern about the injuries, especially that to one of Kingsholm's favourite sons.

JC