

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2013

TWICKENHAM STOOP – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY GLOUCESTER PAY A HEAVY PRICE FOR INDISCIPLINE AT THE STOOP

HARLEQUINS 27 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 19

Taking on Quins at the Stoop is tricky enough at the best of times, but losing three men to yellow cards cost Gloucester the game on Saturday, as they shipped 21 points while outnumbered in a 27-19 defeat.

The sense of frustration following the game in the Gloucester camp was palpable. In so many areas of the game at the Stoop, they more than held their own against Quins.

The set piece was solid, the defence was looking comfortable and the attack was potent enough to score three tries.

However, the periods where Gloucester were light in numbers proved to be key. The majority of Quins' points were scored when they simply had more men on the pitch.

Credit to the home side, they pounced when they had a chance. They will also point to the fact that they had a try chalked off in the second half.

However, Gloucester will feel that it's another instance of '...so near, yet so far...' as they head home without even a losing bonus point to show for their efforts.

There are so many positives that Gloucester can take from this that it makes the defeat all the more irritating. Cut out the mental errors, tighten up on execution and this side can be a match for anyone.

There's no time to sulk after all. Leicester Tigers come to town on Friday evening, and they won't be feeling sorry for Nigel Davies and his side.

It was an inauspicious start for Gloucester. Mike Tindall climbed well to take the kick off, but Matt Kvesic was adjudged to have blocked the chasers. Head on to the posts, Nick Evans made it 3-0 with ease.

It was a lively opening from both teams, but Gloucester stunned their hosts on 10 minutes. A lineout catch and drive took play into the home 22, Huia Edmonds then broke off the base, dummied his way past a static tackler and put Billy Twelvetrees into the corner.

It was a simple try, well executed and a welcome boost for the Cherry and Whites. The Stoop was stunned, but Burns' conversion drifted just wide to keep the score at 3-5.

Quins bounced straight back. Danny Care was beginning to look dangerous, taking quick taps to put pace on the game, but it was the ever-reliable boot of Nick Evans that restored the lead with a 16th minute penalty.

The first quarter passed with neither side really on top. Gloucester weren't getting that much ball to play with, but their defence was coping reasonably well with what Quins had to throw at them.

What was in Quins' favour was the breeze, and Evans used it well to drive Gloucester back deep into their own 22 on 25 minutes, only for his pack to let him down by losing lineout possession.

The game swung Quins' way though as the half hour approached, when Jimmy Cowan was yellow carded for taking out Danny Care after the scrum half chipped ahead.

Quins kicked to the corner and, at the second time of asking, found a weak point in the Gloucester defence and Nick Easter touched down. Evans added the conversion to open up a 13-5 lead.

It was a crucial few minutes and Quins went for the jugular. Another penalty was kicked to the corner and, with Gloucester minus a scrum half, Danny Care spotted a gap around the fringes and dived over. Evans converted again.

Cowan returned from the sin bin, but Gloucester had leaked 14 points in his absence. The half ended with Burns missing a more than kickable penalty attempt, and a regroup at half time was in order.

A 15 point deficit was a kick in the teeth for Gloucester. They'd actually been competitive in the first 40 minutes but paid a dear price for indiscipline.

Harlequins had ruthlessly exploited the man advantage and now had their tails up. To get back into the game, Gloucester first had to slow down their opponents.

To make things that bit harder, there was a further setback during the interval when Charlie Sharples failed to emerge. Martyn Thomas took his spot on the right wing.

It quickly got tougher. Tom Savage drove through a lineout while Quins were still holding George Robson off the ground. The inevitable yellow card followed.

The ball went to the corner, the catch and drive was powerful against an outgunned Gloucester pack, and Luke Wallace was over for the third try. Evans added an excellent conversion for 27-5.

It was a time for big hearts and Gloucester had to dig deep. They couldn't afford to concede another score with Savage in the bin; that was the first priority

However, the decisions continued to go against Gloucester when Martyn Thomas was mysteriously sinbinned on 49 minutes, presumably for going off his feet at a ruck.

Remarkably, the 13 men struck next. Defensive pressure forced a pass to be spilled, Jonny May scooped up the ball, pinned his ears back and was gone. Burns converted from in front.

Buoyed by this, and with Matt Cox replacing Savage, Gloucester piled on the pressure, and referee Carley eventually showed that he wasn't afraid to penalise the home team as he sent George Robson to the sinbin.

Gloucester then dodged a bullet as Tom Williams stepped inside to cross on 62 minutes, only for the TMO to spot a forward pass in the build-up.

The home crowd howled in indignation, but even the most ardent Quins supporter would have admitted that George Robson was lucky to escape as he conceded two penalties near his own line as Gloucester hit back.

The Cherry and Whites continued to fight and piled on the pressure with Quins defending doggedly. It needed a moment of class and Burns provided it, with a chip over the top for Twelvetrees to touch down. The conversion made it 27-19 with five minutes to play.

Gloucester still weren't done, and a Kvesic turnover snatched vital possession. Jonny May chipped ahead and outpaced Matt Hopper but Nick Evans got back to carry the ball over his own line.

A 5-metre scrum beckoned, and a chance of a losing bonus point. However, even that was denied Gloucester as the referee asked the TMO to look at what could be described at worst as handbags.

However, play was called back for another Gloucester piece of mischief. The chance was gone and the Cherry and Whites were left to reflect on what might have been.