

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2013

KINGSHOLM – HEINEKEN CUP

WASTEFUL GLOUCESTER SLIP TO FRUSTRATING EDINBURGH
DEFEAT

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 10 EDINBURGH RUGBY 16

Seven days after comprehensively defeating the same opponent at Murrayfield, Gloucester couldn't make the most of the lion's share of possession on Sunday afternoon and paid the price as Edinburgh dogged out a 16-10 victory.

It was a game that left team and spectators alike grinding their teeth in anguish.

Gloucester dominated up front. They forced penalty after penalty at scrum time, scored a penalty try from a sensational catch and drive, but just couldn't capitalise.

Edinburgh's game plan was pretty simple. It was based largely on fantastic defence and the powerful tactical kicking of Greig Tonks. It proved to be enough.

And the tactics were appropriate in the conditions. Perhaps Gloucester tried to play too much rugby. Perhaps it was one of those days where not having possession is an advantage.

Gloucester did lead twice but, crucially, on both occasions, didn't hold onto the lead for any length of time. Twice Edinburgh struck back and, on the second occasion, held on to the end.

There were chances. The Cherry and Whites drove to within inches of the Edinburgh line on several occasions in the second half, but couldn't breach the solid black wall.

It was the story of the day for Gloucester. Victory was within reach, but it was fumbled away.

The defeat leaves Munster holding the whip hand in pool six of the Heineken Cup. Their last-ditch win over Perpignan on Saturday night now means that they lead the pool by five points.

Of more pressing concern for Gloucester is the visit of Worcester to Kingsholm next weekend. Today was bitterly disappointing for Nigel Davies' side, but the prospect of the local rivals coming to town leaves no time for sulking.

A damp, dark afternoon greeted both teams as kick time arrived at Kingsholm, drizzle swirling around the stadium.

Edinburgh made a host of changes from the side that started at Edinburgh last weekend, but dominated possession in the opening minutes without making much headway against a resolute Gloucester defence.

One of the changes for Edinburgh was the return of Scotland hooker Ross Ford, but his first action was to pop out of two consecutive scrums as the Gloucester pack laid down an early marker.

However, it was first blood to the visitors. Tavis Knoyle was adjudged to have blocked an Edinburgh runner chasing a Greig Tonks up and under, and Jack Cuthbert kicked the penalty.

Freddie Burns had a chance to respond two minutes later but, into the teeth of the wind, his kick drifted wide of the uprights.

The visitors certainly had the wind at their backs, and their tactics were based primarily on the kicking from hand of Tonks and Cuthbert.

It paid dividends again on 18 minutes when Cuthbert slotted his second penalty from distance.

The first quarter elapsed without Gloucester really getting into the game. There had been some brief spells where they'd seemed set to break loose, but the Edinburgh defence was holding up well.

The Cherry and Whites were trying to use their big runners to punch holes, but they were being chopped down quickly and the backs were also getting little change out wide. It was a far different scenario from seven days ago.

It had been a largely uninspiring first 35 minutes, but the Gloucester pack promptly changed that. A catch and drive from the Edinburgh 22 slowly gathered momentum, and then virtually sprinted as they drove the visitors backward.

The pile of bodies went over the line, and referee Poite had seen enough, marching underneath the posts to award the penalty try. Burns converted as Kingsholm awoke from its slumbers.

It also stirred the visitors. Gloucester turned the ball over in midfield, Edinburgh drove it on, won the penalty and Cuthbert made it 7-9 at half time.

So, Edinburgh led at half time but it was difficult to say which team deserved to be in front. The visitors had carved out three penalty opportunities and kicked the lot. Gloucester were more ambitious but wasteful in possession.

Weather conditions had improved so, hopefully, the second half was going to ignite and see Nigel Davies' side gain the ascendancy.

It was almost a stunning start as Gloucester caught Edinburgh napping with a short kick off. Patient build up play saw Matt Kvesic steam into the 22, but Gloucester couldn't finish off the chance.

However, more powerful scrummaging led to another penalty chance for Burns and he nudged Gloucester into a 10-9 lead after 46 minutes.

Once again, the lead was short-lived. Edinburgh produced their most cohesive play of the game, and centre Ben Atiga powered over from close range. Jack Cuthbert added the conversion to silence the crowd.

Murmurs of discontent were now starting to emanate from the crowd as the mistakes continued, but Gloucester escaped when Cuthbert was off target with a kickable penalty.

Sila Puafisi was now on for his debut and the Gloucester pack again went to work, with Willem Nel sinbinned on the hour as Edinburgh buckled again up front. The pressure built on the visitors' line, but Edinburgh escaped.

Frustration grew, and perhaps the final nail in the coffin came as Gloucester forced Edinburgh into touch near their own line. However, as the defender held on to the ball, he was shoved over the advertising hoarding to concede the position and a penalty.

When Ben Morgan was yellow carded moments later, Gloucester's goose looked well and truly cooked.

And so it proved to be. Edinburgh thought they'd scored a second try from close range, but lost the ball going over the line.

It was a let off and gave Gloucester one last chance to launch an attack from deep.

However, the final play glimmer of an opening ended, appropriately, with a knock on, and the Kingsholm faithful drifted off into the dark night pondering on what might have been.