

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2013**

MADEJSKI STADIUM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

GLOUCESTER FINISH 2013 ON A HIGH WITH NARROW IRISH WIN

LONDON IRISH 19 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 22

Nerves jangled throughout a tense final few minutes as London Irish mounted a ferocious comeback, but it was Gloucester who hung on for a crucial 22-19 win.

The win gives Gloucester back-to-back wins for the first time since September but, as has often been the case this season, Gloucester didn't make life easy for themselves.

Holding a ten point lead, going into the final ten minutes, the Cherry and Whites looked well set. However, a late Irish try set alarm bells ringing in the Gloucester ranks only for calm heads to prevail and the win to be clinched.

As Nigel Davies told the media after the game, it allows Gloucester to start looking up the table rather than down and sends his side into 2014 in good spirits.

It was a hard-fought triumph, earned the hard way after conceding a try within a minute of the kick off. It was a day for cool heads and Gloucester prevailed.

Irish may have scored three tries to one, but Gloucester, through the accurate boot of Billy Twelvetrees, simply took the points when they were on offer.

Two wins from two to finish 2013, but the Aviva Premiership season is only half over and a tough task awaits next week with the visit of Saracens to Kingsholm.

Both teams were forced into late changes as Darren Dawidiuk and CJ van der Linde failed fitness tests.

And it was an error from Dawidiuk's replacement, Huia Edmonds, that led indirectly to the first score after only two minutes.

His knock on gifted superb field position to the hosts, who then won a free kick at the scrum.

A quick tap caught Gloucester napping, and Fergus Mulchrone scampered home. Ian Humphreys added the conversion to complete a dream start for the home team.

There was more than a suspicion of a block on Mike Tindall to open the gap, but the try stood. To be fair to Edmonds, he was superb from that moment on.

Gloucester needed to settle and an 8th minute penalty from Billy Twelvetrees was a welcome boost, following powerful work from his pack.

From the restart Irish centre Eamonn Sheridan was lucky to escape yellow as he took Mike Tindall in the air.

It had been a nervy opening, and Gloucester escaped further damage on the scoreboard when Humphreys hooked a long-range penalty across the face of the posts.

After the early setback, the Cherry and Whites were slowly starting to work their way into the game, but the home defence was proving to be robust in their first up tackling.

A smart kick from Rob Cook did bring some reward on 20 minutes though, as a missed lineout throw by the home side resulted in an easy penalty for Twelvetrees.

Huia Edmonds then almost scored a thrilling try from nothing. The hooker took an inside pass from Cowan, then broke a tackle before chipping James O'Connor who just got back to deny Edmonds a sensational score.

Gloucester weren't to be denied, but benefitted from a huge slice of luck in the process.

Irish ran the ball from deep but O'Connor lost control of possession at the ruck. Twelvetrees swooped, flipping the loose ball up to Jonny May who sprinted home down the left wing. The fly half converted to give Gloucester a 13-7 lead.

Half time looked as though it would come with no further addition to the score-line, but Gloucester carved out another penalty opportunity for Twelvetrees who made no mistake.

16-7 was a decent comeback for Gloucester, after the body blow of Mulchrone's early score. However, the overlap scored before Twelvetree's final penalty was a real waste of an opportunity.

All in all, however, the Cherry and Whites could consider themselves reasonably happy with their first half efforts. The Exiles were being forced to play from deep, and nothing much was happening for them.

Nigel Davies' side were solid in the set piece, and looking dangerous at times with ball in hand. More of the same would be required in the second half.

It was a messy opening few minutes when play restarted, and Irish had the first chance of points as Gloucester pulled down a maul only for Humphreys to miss the penalty.

Play then swung from one end to the other in dramatic fashion. Ofisa Treviranus almost made the line for Irish as he spun off a maul, but Gloucester countered and Elliott Stooke was hauled down just a yard short of the home line.

What Gloucester needed was a score to help settle the nerves, and a fantastic scrum from the pack produced a 54th minute penalty for Twelvetrees, his fourth of the afternoon, and a 19-7 lead.

The Exiles needed to produce something and fast. And they duly did. Patient build up play gave Eamonn Sheridan a chance on the right, and the big centre powered over. With 22 minutes to play, it was game on.

Some self-belief was clearly creeping into both the home side and their supporters, but a 61st minute penalty from Burns, after a high tackle on Twelvetrees, made it a ten point margin again at 22-12.

The game was far from won though as the Exiles fought back with passion, Sheridan blasting over on 71 minutes for his team's third try. Geraghty's conversion brought his team back to within three points and nerves were jangling.

Geraghty had a chance to be a hero as he attempted a penalty from long range, but his kick never threatened the posts.

It was as close as Irish got, as Gloucester closed out the game with the four points in the bag.