

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, JANUARY 4, 2014

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

BATTLING GLOUCESTER DISMANTLED BY CLINICAL
SARACENS DISPLAY

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 8 SARACENS 29

After two morale boosting wins over the Festive period, Gloucester were outplayed at Kingsholm on Saturday afternoon, Saracens producing a superb performance to earn a comprehensive win.

It's not that long ago that Saracens were criticised for the dour style of their rugby. Not so nowadays. Against Gloucester today, they produced some rugby at times that would have befitted dry conditions.

In the first half hour, in particular, their ability to offload and change the point of attack meant that Gloucester simply couldn't slow them down.

Gloucester battled hard from first minute to last. However, they were second best on the day against a side on top of their game. Inventive in attack, and employing a suffocating defence, Saracens were good value for their win.

To a certain extent, Gloucester contributed to their own downfall. Mistakes led to at least two of the Saracens tries. However, those mistakes were due mainly due to the pressure created by the visitors.

In terms of the all the teams that have visited Kingsholm this season[*sic*], Saracens have pretty much set the bar. The challenge now is for Gloucester to match those standards.

The game got underway with the pitch looking in remarkably good order given the recent heavy rain. A doff of the cap necessary to the Gloucester ground staff.

Saracens were quickly into their stride, using their juggernaut pack to punch holes in and around the fringes.

Gloucester quickly found themselves desperately defending their own line, and Jimmy Cowan was yellow carded for not rolling away from the tackle area. Owen Farrell had an easy penalty to open the scoring.

Bad quickly went to worse. The visitors' pack drove a maul infield, before Schalk Brits broke down the blindside, feeding Neil de Kock who stepped Rob Cook to score in the corner.

Gloucester were battling hard to get into the game, but were up against a very well organised defence. When Saracens got ball in hand, their offloading game in the conditions was impressive.

But it was good old forward grunt that led to the next scoring opportunity, Gloucester going to ground at a set scrum, and Farrell's penalty just cleared the cross bar for an 0-11 lead after 17 minutes.

The visitors were looking comfortable and it came as no real surprise when a second try quickly followed. More work from the pack made the initial inroads, before slick hands saw Brits scamper into the 22 and put David Strettle over.

Saracens were swift in thought and deed as the half hour mark approached, with Gloucester simply unable to slow them down in attack. It was a real masterclass.

Marcelo Bosch, in particular, was proving to be a real handful in midfield, and it was his half break that led to another Farrell penalty and a 0-19 lead.

Gloucester strove manfully to fight their way back into the game, and the Kingsholm faithful did their best to respond to the effort on the pitch, a Twelvetrees penalty on 39 minutes eventually getting the Cherry and Whites up and running.

It represented the last action of a half which had been dominated by the visitors. Gloucester were giving it everything, but Saracens had simply not put a foot wrong in either attack or defence. It had been a clinical display.

The black and red juggernaut was soon going through the gears again at the start of the second half, as Freddie Burns had a clearance charged down to pile on the pressure.

Gloucester withstood one driving maul, and put pressure on the following Saracens scrum, but the visitors swiftly spun the ball wide, where Alex Goode took advantage of a two on one and skated over. Owen Farrell converted for 3-26.

With half an hour to go, things looked grim but Dan Robson lifted spirits with a lightning break which saw him halted just short. Billy Vunipola, like Cowan before him, didn't roll away and was sinbinned.

Gloucester kicked for the corner, and Steve Borthwick followed Vunipola to the sinbin for taking out the Gloucester jumper at the lineout. Gloucester opted to scrum but, incredibly, were driven off their own ball.

To rub salt into the wound, Saracens moved downfield and Farrell extended the lead to 3-29 with a 61st minute penalty.

It was now a matter of playing for pride and Gloucester, to their credit, kept plugging away against an opponent who were in mood to give them anything.

As the clock reached 70 minutes, Gloucester finally got some reward for their efforts, a powerful rolling maul driving Saracens backwards until Matt Cox touched down. A consolation maybe, but sweet nonetheless.

The Cherry and Whites finished the game with their tails up. Maybe Saracens had switched off mentally a fraction, probably not given the intensity with which they defended.

The likes of Cox and Gareth Evans continued to take the fight to the visitors right up until the very final whistle. Against lesser teams, they would probably have scored more points.

However, not today. Not against this Saracens side.

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