

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SUNDAY, JANUARY 19, 2014

STADE AIME GIRAL – HEINEKEN CUP

**GLORIOUS GLOUCESTER SECURE SUPERB HEINEKEN CUP WIN
IN PERPIGNAN**

PERPIGNAN 18 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 36

Gloucester upset the odds at the Stade Aime Giral on Sunday afternoon, securing a 36-18 bonus point victory over Perpignan that keeps their European aspirations alive.

Gloucester scored five tries in a phenomenal performance, triumphing by 36 points to 18, and securing an away Amlin Challenge Cup quarter final spot in the process.

And it was done in some style. A couple of the scores will go down as contenders for Try of the Season, while the icing on the cake was a powerful pushover try for Ben Morgan with the game in its final moments.

The win delighted the hordes of travelling supporters, who may have been outnumbered, but who were certainly not outdone in terms of volume. They provided great backing throughout.

It wasn't all one-way traffic. Perpignan, predictably, played some good stuff in front of their own supporters and were very much in the game with 15 or minutes or so left to play.

However, when nerves could have crept in, Freddie Burns dropped a crucial goal while Gloucester's tactical kicking was spot on, driving the home side back deep into their own 22. Morgan's late contribution sealed the deal.

Overall, it was a thoroughly deserved win. The forwards took on their counterparts, scrummaging powerfully up front. Meanwhile, the backs looked dangerous whenever they had ball in hand.

It's a big win in the context of Gloucester's season, and a huge boost for everyone concerned with the club.

Gloucester came into the game knowing that nothing less than a bonus point win would keep them in the hunt for an Amlin Challenge Cup quarter final spot – no easy task at the Stade Aime Giral.

The game got underway with Gloucester wearing their change strip, and a brass band blasting out the tunes in a stadium that could have been little more than half full.

Gloucester's discipline came under scrutiny in the opening exchanges, one penalty at the breakdown conceding territory, the next giving Tom Ecochard a chance to go for the posts, and the scrum half made no mistake.

It was a fast and open first few minutes of the game, Perpignan even having the courage to run the ball from behind their own line through Votu when seemingly under pressure.

Nigel Davies' side looked up for playing a similarly open style of rugby but were coming off second best when it came to refereeing decisions.

However, the 14th minute saw a moment of magic from Jonny May. Piukala spilled the ball on the Gloucester 10 metre line, and May was off, dodging and weaving. Two Perpignan defenders collided as they spun trying to keep up, and May crossed for a superb score.

The home side were quickly back in front though, with Piukala making up for his earlier error. The forwards came close, but swift hands across the backline saw Piukala straighten beautifully, slice through and dive over untouched. Ecochard converted for 10-5.

Freddie Burns was starting to boss the game nicely, but he turned down a kickable penalty on the half hour and it led to Gloucester's second try.

The catch and drive was repelled, and Matt Cox almost spun out of a tackle to make the line. But Gloucester stayed patient, moved the ball left and Shane Monahan broke a tackle to score. Burns added a magnificent touchline conversion to edge his team into a 10-12 lead.

An incredible phase of play then followed. Ecochard hit the post with a penalty and Gloucester went for it from their own 22.

Gareth Evans did superbly, a dummy sending him clear down the right before the number eight passed inside unselfishly to Charlie Sharples for the third try. Burns converted again.

Ecochard was wide with an ambitious penalty attempt from out wide as half time approached, and there was an injury scare for James Hudson but Gloucester went into half time with a decent 19-10 lead.

It had been a pulsating half of rugby, which had flown by. Both teams were moving the ball around with abandon but Gloucester had shown a welcome cutting edge to shade the first half.

There was still a huge amount to play for, and Perpignan were certainly not going to simply roll over in the second half. They'd shown enough danger to make their threat abundantly clear.

But Gloucester were going well. One more try and, of course, securing the win would be enough to keep Europe alive. A long way to go, though.

The second half got off to a bad start. James Hudson took the restart but was penalised for holding on in the tackle. Ecochard's penalty was head on to the posts and he made no mistake.

Gloucester proceeded to spend the next few minutes deep in the Perpignan 22, as they worked the corner looking for the bonus point try.

The forwards went close, softening up the defence round the fringes, before Robson spun the ball out to Shane Monahan who powered over. There was a nervous moment as the TMO looked at a possible knock on in the build-up, but the try was awarded. Burns converted for 13-26.

As news came through from Ireland that Munster were winning well against Edinburgh, things looked set fair. But Perpignan weren't done just yet.

With Luke Narraway leading the way against his former club, the home side started to get their offloading game going, and replacement scrum half Nicolas Durand put Karl Chateau over for a 63rd minute try to narrow the gap to 18-26.

It could have been a tense last 15 minutes, but Gloucester played it just right. Astute tactical kicking kept Perpignan pinned back, forcing them to play from deep.

The pressure told as Freddie Burns dropped a goal to extend the lead, before a frustrated Perpignan side finally lost their cool as replacement prop Georgi Jgenti was yellow carded for punching.

Minus a man in the scrum, the home side, who had been creaking up front in any case, were now outgunned and Morgan controlled the ball superbly from a 5 metre scrum to close the game out.

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