

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2014**

**A J BELL STADIUM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**YELLOW CARDS PROVE TO BE GLOUCESTER'S UNDOING  
IN DEFEAT AT SALE**

**SALE SHARKS 24 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 19**

Gloucester endured a hugely frustrating evening at the AJ Bell Stadium, a yellow card either side of half time proving pivotal as 14 points were conceded while down to 14 men in a 24-19 defeat to Sale Sharks.

It was a game that Gloucester could, and maybe should, have won. Playing into a strong wind, they had a great start and were on level terms at 10-10 with half time approaching.

However, five minutes of madness either side of the half time interval proved to be the difference. Gloucester lost two men to the sin bin during this period and conceded 14 points.

The first try conceded, with James Hudson in the sin bin, was painful enough. The second came after Gloucester failed to catch the restart after the break. It was a basic error and led to Sila Puafisi's yellow card and another Sale try.

Trailing 24-10, Gloucester mounted a spirited comeback. However, they never really came close to adding to the two tries they scored in the first half, and had to rely on Freddie Burns' boot for points.

Kicking conditions were difficult, and the fly half struck the ball well. But a couple of key efforts slid wide and his three successful efforts only earned Gloucester a losing bonus point.

It will be a subdued coach ride home for the Cherry and Whites as they reflect on where this one slipped away.

Speaking after the game, Director of Rugby Nigel Davies rued lack of accuracy and poor discipline. The video analysis will provide plenty of food for thought with a testing trip to Leicester lying in wait next weekend.

Yet the evening started so well as it was very nearly a dream opening to the game for Gloucester, turning over Rob Miller in his own 22. Quick ball gave Martyn Thomas some space in which to work, but the Sale cover defence just got back.

However, it only delayed the inevitable. A quickly taken lineout caught the home team on the hop, Cowan's grubber kick was beautifully weighted and Thomas ran on to gather and score.

Sale lost Peel briefly as he had a head injury checked over but regrouped quickly to get back on terms.

Strong running from the likes of Leota and Gaskell took them deep into the Gloucester 22 as a couple of first up tackles were missed, before a swift pass to the left wing saw Rob Miller scramble over to level the scores.

And Miller crossed again five minutes later, just after receiving treatment for a considerable period of time.

Sale kicked to the corner, but the forward drive was easily stopped. However, a neat backs move saw Miller get the ball in space, step inside a tackle and fight his way to the line. In windy conditions, Cipriani's conversion floated wide.

A decent start for Gloucester had been undone within the space of a few minutes and, disappointingly, Sale hadn't had to work too hard for the scores with Gloucester's tackling coming under scrutiny.

Fortunately for Gloucester, Miller did prove to be fallible, dragging a penalty attempt wide from halfway. The wind was behind him, but the accuracy was lacking.

Having taken something of a pummelling, Gloucester struck after 29 minutes and stunned the home crowd.

Freddie Burns tapped quickly and put the ball deep behind Mark Cueto, who let it bounce and seemingly didn't sense Charlie Sharples behind him. The Gloucester wing didn't pause, snaffled the loose ball and just made the line. 10-10 after half an hour.

Once again, the home side hit back. Gloucester were pinned back and lost a lineout near their own line, and James Hudson was sinbinned for knocking the ball out of Peel's hands.

Sale kicked for the corner, set up the catch and drive and rumbled over, flanker Dan Braid claiming the try. Cipriani converted to make the half time score 17-10 to the home side.

The Cherry and Whites would have been hugely frustrated to trail at half time having levelled the scores on the half hour. They'd been forced to play with ball in hand as the strong wind was negating their kicking game.

That had cost them dear as half time approached, solid defence causing a key turnover in the Gloucester 22. But they could take comfort from knowing that the elements would be at their backs in the second half.

However, Gloucester started the second half by committing the cardinal sin of letting the restart bounce. Sale piled on the pressure and Sila Puafisi was sinbinned for exactly the same offence as James Hudson.

Sale went for the corner again, and the six-man Gloucester pack was outgunned. Over went the Sharks for the bonus point try, and Cipriani's conversion made it 24-10.

The game had swung decisively the way of the home team either side of half time in a hugely frustrating fashion, but Freddie Burns slotted a 46th minute penalty to narrow the gap.

Gloucester had to endure some real pressure in the minutes that followed, but finally got back up to 15 men before Nigel Davies brought on fresh blood in Matt Kvesic, Shane Monahan, Dan Robson and Yann Thomas.

Koree Britton and Will James were also soon introduced and Freddie Burns slotted a 61st minute penalty, but was off target with two subsequent efforts as Gloucester strove to get back into striking range.

Burns did make it a one score game in 77 minutes, as his penalty narrowed the gap to 24-19. Gloucester tried desperately to run the ball from deep in an effort to snatch the win.

However, they were left to watch on nervously as Rob Miller tried to deny them the losing bonus point with the last kick of the game, but his penalty was off.

JC