

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2014**

WELFORD ROAD – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

BRAVE GLOUCESTER EARN THEIR STRIPES IN THE TIGERS LAIR

LEICESTER TIGERS 11 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 8

Gloucester battled like demons in the cauldron-like atmosphere of Welford Road Sunday afternoon, but went down to a late Toby Flood penalty as the Tigers edged a narrow 11-8 win.

Largely written off before the game, Gloucester fronted up manfully against the Tigers, took the lead with half an hour to go and then hung on grimly.

In the end, it all came down to two controversial calls at scrum time. With the game finely poised at 8-8, Dan Robson was pinged for not feeding the scrum straight at a key moment on the Gloucester 22.

The Tigers promptly escaped with an even worse transgression of the same offence, won a penalty and Toby Flood kicked the penalty that won the game.

It was a real kick in the teeth for the Cherry and Whites who frankly deserved better. In both halves, they carved out some genuine gilt-edged scoring chances but could only convert one into a try.

The Tigers did enjoy a slight supremacy at scrum time but, by and large, they were negated as an attacking threat by a superbly committed Gloucester defence.

Had Nigel Davies' side escaped with the points, few outside of the Leicester camp, could have complained.

What Gloucester have to do now, is replicate the intensity of this performance. With games against Harlequins and Northampton looming, nothing else will do.

However, if they take the positives out of the heartache of today, show the same passion and commitment, then they will be competitive.

After the recent deluges of rain that have affected large swathes of the country, it was a pleasant change to see blue skies as kick off time approached. The Welford Road pitch also looked in very decent nick.

The Cherry and Whites almost had a superb start as Henry Trinder climbed high to take Ryan Mills' restart deep in the Tigers 22. But committed home defence drove Gloucester backwards to end the threat.

In fact it was a bright start from Gloucester, and a try in the left hand corner from Sione Kalamafoni was chalked off when Martyn Thomas' hurried pass was rightly ruled forward.

Leicester regrouped and had a chance of their own when Daren Dawidiuk failed to roll away from the tackle area, but Toby Flood's penalty held up in the wind and drifted wide.

Gloucester were then so very close to crossing the line again. Mills' long pass put Rob Cook in space, before Martyn Thomas streaked down the line. The wing offloaded inside as the cover got across but Matt Kvesic, who seemed to be tackled early, couldn't gather and knocked on.

A superb grubber from Dan Robson then pinned the home team back and set up an attacking 5-metre scrum for Gloucester, but the power of the Leicester scrummage disrupted possession and the chance was gone.

Typically, the Tigers very nearly scored from their first visit to the Gloucester 22. Salvi chased and tapped back a Flood up and under and Tom Youngs spun out of a tackle to carry play on, but brave defence kept the green hordes at bay.

It had been a good opening half hour from Gloucester, plenty of ambition in attack and attitude in defence. The home crowd were growing restless with things not going all their way . . .

The only real area of concern was at scrum time where the Tigers pack seemed to be getting the upper hand. And they got their reward on 32 minutes, as the pack earned a penalty and Flood's penalty opened the scoring.

Rob Cook had a chance to strike back three minutes later, but his long-range penalty, as the Tigers were penalised for crossing, lacked the necessary distance which wasn't an issue three minutes later as the full back levelled the scores.

Three points apiece at half time, a pretty fair reflection of how things had gone. Gloucester had more than held their own in the first half, but were now going to have to play into the wind.

It had been a battling first 40 minutes from the Cherry and Whites, but an awful lot more of the same would be needed in the second half.

The home side, predictably, came out bristling with indignation after the resumption, but Nigel Davies' side were full of invention, Charlie Sharples launching a surprise counter from his own 22.

And there was still plenty of commitment in defence, Sila Puafisi delivering his second monstrous hit of the afternoon but unfortunately knocking himself out of the game in the process, the Tongan replaced by Rupert Harden.

And Gloucester then had the audacity to take the lead. Patient build up play created space on the right and Henry Trinder arced around Tom Youngs. Thomas took it on, a sublime inside pass found Sharples and the winger was over.

Ryan Mills then almost conjured up a second. His break and offload to Sione Kalamafoni sent the back rower thundering into the Tigers 22, but he failed to see the unmarked Sharples outside him.

As the game went into the final 15 minutes, the volume was rising as the home crowd urged the Tigers on, but still Gloucester dug in.

However, the fortress finally crumbled on 69 minutes. The Tigers forwards smashed forward, getting over the gain line, before quick ball and slick hands put Mathew Tait scampering over. Flood missed the conversion so it was 8-8.

It was game on an everything to play for. However, there was one final twist in the tail in this enthralling encounter.

Dan Robson was called for a not straight feed by the touch judge, who was a good 25 metres away. David Mele then produced an even wonkier feed at the subsequent scrum, but play went on. Leicester won the penalty, Flood knocked it over and the game was won.

A bitter blow, but Gloucester will take many positives from this as they contemplate life on the way home.

JC