

# GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, MARCH 1, 2014

FRANKLIN'S GARDENS – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

SECOND HALF SAINTS STRENGTH JUST TOO MUCH  
FOR DOGGED GLOUCESTER

NORTHAMPTON SAINTS 39 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 13

Gloucester gave it everything at Franklin's Gardens on Saturday afternoon, competing well for an hour but were eventually ground down by the high-flying Northampton Saints, 39-13 the final score.

It was a day when the Saints showed exactly why they have only lost once in the Aviva Premiership this season; total self-belief easing them clear in the final quarter.

In truth it was a scrappy old encounter until Northampton's strong finish, both teams as guilty as each other in terms of the error count. But there was little to choose between the two sides.

Gloucester had fronted up manfully for an hour or so. They'd actually succeeded in extracting a few disgruntled murmurs out of the Franklin's Gardens faithful as they hung in there at 13-13, but it all counted for naught in the final 20 minutes.

Northampton introduced a number of new faces from the bench, possibly with Jim Mallinder's words ringing in their ears, and they found a new gear during that period.

Tries on 56 and 65 minutes, for Clark and Stephenson, effectively finished the contest, but the Saints weren't quite done.

With Will James in the sin bin, the bonus point try was secured on 75 minutes and another followed before the final whistle blew.

It was clinical stuff and Gloucester could only reflect on how the wheels had come off, particularly after some stirring performances in recent weeks.

The Cherry and Whites now have two weeks without a game before Newcastle come to Kingsholm on March 22nd, and Director of Rugby Nigel Davies reflected ruefully after the game that he would have preferred to get straight back into action to get today out of the system.

It's important for Gloucester to rebound strongly. They will be looking to establish some momentum in the final few weeks of the season and, of course, there is a European quarter-final in the offing.

Gloucester had to make three late changes. Sione Kalamafoni withdrew with a stiff neck, Darren Dawidiuk was unwell and Jimmy Cowan's partner went into labour. Saints lined up as announced.

Gloucester needed a good start against a team bang in form and with confidence high, but got exactly the opposite.

A Freddie Burns up and under bounced loose on halfway, was gathered by Ken Pisi and the winger sprinted home untouched. Myler added an easy conversion. It was a gift for Saints, one they didn't really need.

But Gloucester got a gift of their own on seven minutes. A Tom Stephenson break had opened up Gloucester, but a loose pass was plucked out of the air by Henry Trinder who duly ran it back the length of the field. Burns converted to level the scores.

It was a lively response from Gloucester. Huia Edmonds stole possession at a ruck, chipped ahead and appeared to be tackled late, but nothing was given. The same thing happened a few minutes later...

However, it was the home team who edged their way into the lead as Myler added a penalty when Gloucester appeared to be harshly penalised at a ruck. The ball carrier was isolated with two defenders on the ball, but got the benefit of the decision.

Gloucester then got a couple of refereeing calls. A free kick for a crooked feed was followed by a penalty for not rolling away, and Freddie Burns levelled the scores after 23 minutes.

It was pretty even stuff at this point, with neither side really able to gain the upper hand, and the home crowd was starting to get a little restless as the half hour mark passed.

The Gloucester scrum started to come under some pressure as half time approached, and this gave the home team some easy territorial gains. A catch and drive threatened the Gloucester line, but Saints had to settle for a Myler penalty.

So, Nigel Davies' side went into half time still well in touch at 13-10, and asking plenty of questions of the home side. The game was a real arm wrestle and both tries had a whiff of fortune about them.

The next score would be crucial. If it went the way of the home side, they could start to ease away. If it went to Gloucester, it would be game on.

The second half started in scrappy fashion. There were plenty of errors from both sides, but Gloucester clawed their way back on to level terms via a Burns' penalty after good carrying from Hudson and Edmonds.

Jim Mallinder had seen enough and sent on a number of his replacements to change things up[sic] and the home team piled on the pressure.

Gloucester dug deep, but eventually something had to give. The Cherry and Whites held out for a while close to their own line, but Calum Clark finally wriggled out of a tackle to score. Myler added the extras for a 20-13 lead after 56 minutes.

The Cherry and Whites were still fighting hard and competing well. Billy Burns was sent on for his Premiership debut on the hour and immediately added a little zip to the back line.

However, the home team struck decisively on 65 minutes. Clean lineout ball was spun into midfield where Tom Stephenson cut a great angle, broke a tackle and dived over. Myler converted and it was now a two-score game at 27-13.

With the home crowd now finding their collective voice, it was merely a question of whether Northampton would get the try scoring bonus point. The task was made that much easier when Will James was sinbinned, and Alex Waller duly drove over from a catch and drive.

There was still time for replacement Will Hooley to scamper over to rub salt into some already raw wounds.

It was a day to forget for Gloucester, but it's important that lessons are learned and that the Cherry and Whites aspire to match the vein of form that the Saints are currently in.

JC