

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, MARCH 22, 2014**

**KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**GLOUCESTER TURN ON THE STYLE AS THEY CLIP  
THE FALCON'S WINGS**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 40 NEWCASTLE FALCONS 33**

Gloucester enjoyed themselves in the spring sunshine at Kingsholm on Saturday afternoon, despite spirited opposition from the Newcastle Falcons, running in five tries on their way to a 40-33 victory.

It was a win that showed Gloucester at their very, very best at times. However, the final 15 minutes somewhat took the gloss off things as the visitors rallied from a 37-7 deficit and earned two points of their own.

Bittersweet was how Director of Rugby Nigel Davies described it after the game, after what looked set to be a one-sided outcome actually became quite tense in the final few minutes.

The Falcons finished with four tries in the final 17 minutes as Gloucester seemed to switch off mentally, while the visitors had absolutely nothing left to lose and chanced their arm in fine style.

But the bottom line is that Gloucester secured the five points having played some great rugby at times. That will be the positive aspect that the coaches take from today's game, while the final 15 minutes keep everybody's feet on the ground.

The first hour or so pretty much delighted the Kingsholm faithful. Newcastle were dogged opponents, but Gloucester oozed menace every time they attacked.

A 17-7 half time lead, with two tries in the bag, was comfortable enough but the gap could have been even wider. Several scoring chances went begging.

The bonus point was wrapped up within 15 minutes of the restart and, when Jonny May scored the fifth on the hour, the home crowd licked their lips at the prospect of a thrilling final quarter.

But it didn't quite work out that way. What looked like a consolation score for George McGuigan, was quickly followed by another for Andy Saull and alarm bells began to quietly ring.

When Alex Tait scored Newcastle's fourth try, murmurs of discontent drifted around the stadium but Rob Cook's 77th minute penalty seemed to settle things down, only for Noah Cato to score a fifth Newcastle try as time expired to secure a losing bonus point.

An entertaining encounter duly came to an end with both teams taking something from the game but neither looking particularly happy.

Gloucester started the game in fine style, moving the ball wide whenever possible and stretching the Newcastle defence. One such passage of play created a half chance but James Hudson's pass didn't find his man.

A half break from Dan Robson then saw the scrum half scampering into the Newcastle 22, but his offload couldn't be taken by the supporting player. It was all Gloucester but the breakthrough remained elusive.

And it was the Falcons who nearly drew first blood, Phil Godman missing a 12th minute penalty when the Gloucester backs came up offside at a lineout.

Referee Wayne Barnes then drew the ire of the home crowd when he firstly blocked a would-be Gloucester tackler, then yellow carded James Hudson for coming in at the side of a ruck.

Minus their lineout guru, Gloucester adapted smartly and a well-crafted catch and drive set up a position from which Sione Kalamafoni powered over from close range. Rob Cook added the conversion.

Newcastle's response was impressive, and some slick play took the visitors to within a few metres of the Gloucester line but a rampaging Scott MacLeod couldn't hold on to the ball on the charge.

It was a good spell for the visitors, and they finally got their reward as they created an overlap on the right and number eight Chris York scored in the corner. Godman converted as Hudson returned from the sin bin.

Back up to 15 men, Gloucester tried to up the tempo and it paid immediate dividends. Kalamafoni made the initial inroads before slick hands gave Cook room to run and he dummed to Sharples outside him before sprinting over. For good measure, Cook added the conversion.

Martyn Thomas was nearly over for the third try, unable to hang on to Jimmy Cowan's bullet pass, but Cook added a 35th minute penalty to extend the lead to 17-7.

There was a lengthy delay as the young Newcastle winger received treatment before being sadly stretchered off, and that was it for the first half.

The Cherry and Whites could be reasonably happy with the state of affairs at half time, and the lead could easily have been greater.

The Falcons were putting up a spirited fight, but Gloucester looked to have more tries in them. The first score of the second half would be key and would go a long way to determining the overall outcome.

Sione Kalamafoni was swiftly back in rampaging ball carrying action when the second half resumed, smashing tacklers like skittles and a second penalty from Cook was the result as Newcastle buckled at scrum time.

Then followed a sweet moment for James Hudson as he charged down Mike Blair's attempted clearance from deep in his own 22 and won the race to touch down as the ball ran into the in-goal area. Cook converted for 27-7.

It was the big second row's first try for Gloucester, against his former club, and a moment he obviously enjoyed as did the Kingsholm crowd.

Nigel Davies' side were now starting to enjoy themselves. Huia Edmonds couldn't find Charlie Sharples with the line beckoning but it only delayed the inevitable when Mike Tindall blasted his way over in the corner. 32-7 after 58 minutes and the bonus point in the bag.

Nigel Davies chose this moment to send Jonny May and Ben Morgan on from the bench, and the former promptly scored with his first touch after a great midfield break and offload from Matt Kvesic.

Perhaps Gloucester switched off mentally a touch, but Newcastle weren't giving up just yet and replacement hooker George McGuigan produced a strong run to score his team's first try. Joel Hodgson converted.

And when Newcastle's pack rumbled over from a rolling maul with 12 minutes to go, Andy Saull, claiming the try, there was renewed belief in the visitors' ranks.

Alex Tait crossed for the Falcons fourth to well and truly put the cat amongst the pigeons, but Rob Cook's 77th minute penalty seemed to put an end to all the nonsense.

But there was one last twist in the tail. Newcastle kept on going and finally worked an opening for Noah Cato to score. Joel Hodgson, who had certainly livened up the back play since his introduction on the hour, showed nerves of steel to convert and earn the losing bonus point.