

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, MARCH 29, 2014**

**SANDY PARK – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**GLOUCESTER HANG ON FOR HARD FOUGHT 14-13 WIN AT CHIEFS**

**EXETER CHIEFS 13 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 14**

Gloucester produced one of their most battling performances of 2013-14 at Sandy Park on Saturday afternoon, to earn their third Aviva Premiership win on the road this season by the narrowest of margins.

People often talk about a game going down to the wire – this one did ! Gloucester spent much of the final 10 minutes clinging on to a 14-8 lead. But two yellow cards and a last ditch try looked as though the Chiefs were going to snatch the win.

However, Gareth Steenson, who knows the conditions at Sandy Park better than anyone, saw his conversion attempt slide past the right hand upright and Gloucester were able to celebrate a hard fought and deserved win.

It was well merited. There wasn't much between the two sides, but Gloucester just had that little bit extra about them. A massive forward effort set the platform, with committed defence and smart attack building on it.

It wasn't easy, and Nigel Davies' side had to overcome the losses of Darren Dawidiuk and Ryan Mills through injury. But the side dug deep and it's a massive morale booster ahead of next weekend's Amlin Challenge Cup quarter final.

A clear and bright day greeted both sides, but it was obvious from the flags that goal kicking was going to be a difficult art.

Gloucester appeared to have got a dream start as Rob Cook scampered over after only two minutes. But referee Carley went upstairs and spotted a knock on in the build-up. It was a real escape for the home side.

The chance had come after a handling error by the Chiefs in their own 22, and the first few minutes were noticeable for an unusually high number of handling mishaps by the home side.

Exeter were obviously keen to get into their high tempo game and a half break by Henry Slade, supported by Luke Arscott, gave the former the first chance of points as Gloucester were penalised for not rolling away. Slade nailed the penalty.

Jonny May promptly gave the home crowd a taste of what he could do as Mike Tindall put him into space down the left, but his chip ahead was well covered by Slade.

The Chiefs enjoyed a good spell, but were well matched by some strong Gloucester defence. The Cherry and White pack then produced a great scrum to set up Rob Cook to level the scores after 19 minutes.

There was very little to choose between the two sides at this point. Both teams were trying to play expansive rugby, but defences were ruling the roost as the half hour mark approached.

One area of disquiet for Gloucester was the officiating. On several occasions referee Carley, who had dished out five yellows in two games to the Cherry and Whites earlier this season, gave marginal calls to the home team and Gloucester's unhappiness was apparent.

But it was another good old shove at scrum time that gave Gloucester the lead on 33 minutes, Cook bisecting the posts in fine style after great work from his pack.

However, the lead was short-lived. The home pack's lineout drive made inroads into the Gloucester 22, before the backs were released and Matt Jess showed good strength to make the right-hand corner.

Slade missed the conversion but the Chiefs held an 8-6 lead at half time after Gloucester finished the half threatening but without taking advantage of some good field position.

The first 40 minutes had been a real arm wrestle and Gloucester could feel slightly aggrieved at trailing. Cook's try being disallowed was a cruel blow but the Chiefs had taken their own chance well.

There was a sense that the game would open up in the second half, the ambition of both sides suggested so, and the first score would be key.

Gloucester started well and another penalty at scrum time saw Twelvetrees drive play into the Chiefs 22. Good work in the tight took Gloucester into the shadow of the Exeter posts but they had to settle for a third Cook penalty.

However, better was to immediately follow. The pack nicked Exeter lineout ball, Freddie Burns fired the ball out to Tindall, Cook took a great line after the centre sucked in the defence and put Charlie Sharples into the corner for a try on his 100th Premiership appearance. 8-14 after 49 minutes.

The Chiefs looked to hit straight back, some strong ball carrying down the left making good ground. Tom Johnson then made a good midfield break but his inside pass flew well forward.

Cook missed a chance on the hour to extend the lead as his penalty attempt drifted wide, while Billy Twelvetrees knocked on when well-placed when he didn't see Matt Jess' tackle coming. The chance had been created by neat work by Burns who was performing well, having replaced Ryan Mills.

With Gloucester seemingly defending comfortably, a key decision then went against the Cherry and Whites when they were bizarrely penalised for not releasing the tackled player as they held him up off the ground in a choke tackle. Steenson's kick took play into the Gloucester 22.

Predictably, Exeter threw the kitchen sink at Gloucester, Sam Hill and Gareth Steenson both came close as the Cherry and Whites defended their line with grim determination.

It was all set to go down to the wire, and things went wrong still further for Gloucester when Sila Puafisi was yellow carded for a late hit on Steenson.

Exeter sensed blood, kicked for the corner and piled on the pressure. With time almost up, Sione Kalamafoni was also yellow carded as a rolling maul was dragged down.

Finally, Don Armond forced his way over from close range for a crucial try and it was all down to Gareth Steenson's conversion with the score at 13-14.

The Irishman won the equivalent fixture last season with a late kick. Today his kick drifted just wide and Gloucester held on for a memorable win.

JC