

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, MAY 3, 2014

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**GLOUCESTER OUTLAST IRISH IN SEESAW THRILLER
AT KINGSHOLM**

GLOUCESTER 38 LONDON IRISH 30

Both teams had a winger who scored a hat trick, and both scored a try scoring bonus point. But it was Gloucester who edged an end-to-end encounter against London Irish by 38 points to 30.

It was a match where the final outcome was in doubt right up until the final minute and, in a way, summarised Gloucester's season as a whole.

There was so much that was good about the Cherry and Whites play today. However, every time they opened up a decent lead, they allowed the Exiles back into the game.

Some of the defensive frailties were understandable as Gloucester lost two key members of their back line, Billy Twelvetrees and Charlie Sharples, by the mid-point of the second half.

And London Irish were a side with nothing to lose. They played with ambition and stretched Gloucester on numerous occasions.

In their ranks they possessed a potent weapon in Marland Yarde, although Gloucester boasted their own hat trick scoring winger in the shape of Shane Monahan.

The visitors, who had trailed 17-5 at one point, fought back and even took the lead briefly with 12 minutes to go. It stunned Kingsholm, but Gloucester had the character, and the backing of a superb crowd, to battle back and snatch the win.

Some of that was down to the cool head of Freddie Burns. He had a few tricky kicks on the afternoon, but slotted some vital late ones to take him past 1000 competitive points for the club on his final outing at Kingsholm.

The result moves Nigel Davies' side up to eighth place in the table with just one match left to play. It's a short trip up the M5 to Worcester. With the Warriors now confirmed as relegated, it will be a strange encounter at Sixways and Gloucester will have some injury concerns ahead of next weekend.

The game started in wonderful fashion for Gloucester. Billy Twelvetrees made a fine midfield break and the supporting Jimmy Cowan took play on. Quick ball moved the play left where Elliott Stooke's pass, which would have done a three quarter justice, put Sione Kalamafoni over. Twelvetrees added the extras.

Irish almost hit straight back as they turned over possession from the restart but, with a try beckoning, wonderful defence from Jimmy Cowan and Rob Cook saved the day.

But Gloucester's second try wasn't long in coming. Freddie Burns, showing great vision, put in a wonderful cross kick and Charlie Sharples had way too much pace for Tom Homer, gathering the bouncing ball and scoring.

Unfortunately, the Cherry and Whites were then dealt a blow as skipper Billy Twelvetrees limped off to sympathetic applause. Shane Monahan came on in his place.

It had been largely one way traffic up to this point, but Marland Yarde then scored a stunner. He was helped by some weak defence as he cut between two defenders, but it was a fine solo effort to narrow the gap to 12-5.

The game started to settle after its blistering start, but Gloucester were forced into another injury-enforced back line reshuffle on 22 minutes when Charlie Sharples was replaced by Billy Meakes, the winger pulling up with a dead leg.

It didn't put Gloucester off their stride. A lineout thrown long over the top sent Kalamafoni smashing his way to within metres of the Irish line. Gloucester stayed patient, worked the phases and Shane Monahan powered his way over from close range. 17-5 after 25 minutes.

In a bid to battle their way back into the game, Irish spent most of the next ten minutes or so camped in the Gloucester 22. The Cherry and Whites defended like demons, but conceded a number of penalties and, eventually, Jimmy Cowan was sinbinned.

Being a man light proved to be just too much for Gloucester, although they continued to defend with pride, as that man Yarde again wriggled out of a tackle to stretch and make the line. Humphreys converted for 17-12.

An entertaining first half came to an end with everything still to play for. Gloucester had dominated early on, but the visitors had hung on doggedly and refused to throw in the towel.

Yarde's second try on the stroke of half time was a real boost for the Exiles, although they were made to work incredibly hard for it by some committed Gloucester defence.

Nigel Davies' side would have to regain the momentum they had established before the enforced changes if they were to sign off at Kingsholm on a winning note.

Once again, though, the half started with a bang for Gloucester. Rob Cook took a high ball and offloaded to Mike Tindall. The centre amazingly had no-one in front of him, made good ground and found Monahan who held off Yarde to touch down.

Incredibly, once more, the visitors hit straight back. An offload from Rob Cook found Irish hands on halfway and, with Gloucester at sixes and sevens in defence, Gerard Ellis finished off the counter attack after a good offload from Yarde before he was shoved into touch.

Burns settled the nerves with a penalty to extend the lead to eight points before, to a man, Kingsholm took to its feet to applaud Will James as he left the field for the last time.

The game was still very much alive, and the seesaw nature of things continued when Yarde again showed great strength to score on the hour mark after some neat sleight of hand by Humphreys whose superb touchline conversion made it 25-24 with still 19 minutes left to play.

Sublime went to ridiculous as Irish countered again. Monahan slipped over and Yarde again made huge yardage. Gloucester got back but conceded a penalty in front of the posts and Humphreys gave his side the lead.

A nervous shudder reverberated around Kingsholm, but the action was far from over. Burns booted his team back into the lead with a 72nd minute penalty from halfway before Shane Monahan completed his hat trick.

It was courtesy of strong work at the breakdown by Mike Tindall, who won possession when he had no right to do so. Tom Young linked with Tom Savage before floating a long pass and Monahan was in.

Even then, Irish weren't done. Myles Dorrian kicked a last-minute penalty to get the Exiles back within losing bonus point range at 35-30.

But Burns had the last word as Irish desperately tried to run the ball out of their 22 with no time left on the clock.

They only succeeded in conceding a penalty bang in front of the posts and the Gloucester fly half made no mistake to make the final score 38-30.