

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, MAY 10, 2014

SIXWAYS – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP

GLOUCESTER EDGED OUT 27-28 AT WORCESTER WARRIORS

WORCESTER WARRIORS 28 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 27

Gloucester outscored their opponents by four tries to three, but ended 2013-14 with an agonising narrow defeat to the already relegated Worcester Warriors, 27 points to 28.

It was a performance and a result that, in some ways, sums up Gloucester's season as a whole. There was so much to admire in Gloucester's game, but what looked to be a nailed-on win ended in a narrow defeat.

Three tries in the first 24 minutes, two of them absolute stunners, seemed to have set the Cherry and Whites on their way. But that old Achilles heel, indiscipline, came back to haunt Nigel Davies' side.

Two yellow cards and the frustration of not being able to adapt to an arguably inconsistent refereeing performance took their toll. Despite all that, a battered and bruised side competed right up until the very last whistle.

It all came down to a last-minute penalty attempt as Freddie Burns, lining up his kick into a swirling wind, couldn't punish the home side for pulling down a rolling maul that looked set to score.

No blame attached whatsoever to the fly half. It was a tough kick and, alongside his younger brother Billy, Burns put his body on the line time and again throughout the afternoon.

It was actually a performance that showed a lot of guts and character from Gloucester. Already light on numbers due to injury, they were forced into yet more changes before kick-off and finished the game with a number of forwards playing in the back line.

To then stun the home crowd by romping into a 17-3 lead hinted at a memorable afternoon. But, crucially, the momentum turned in the final few minutes before half time.

A fourth try looked certain but possession was surrendered. Jonny May was yellow carded in a subsequent phase of play, and Worcester then scored. 17-15 to Gloucester was actually a triumph for the home side who went in with their tails up.

The second half was less dramatic, although the final ten minutes were high on intrigue and, finally, it was former Gloucester starlet Ryan Lamb who put the boot into his old team with a crucial late penalty.

Gloucester, sadly, have plenty of time to dwell on defeat with the competitive season coming to an end. But areas of weakness have already been identified and are being worked on to ensure that the Cherry and Whites bounce back in style in 2014-15.

Gloucester had to reshuffle their line up as game time approached. Henry Trinder withdrew with a recurrence of the hamstring injury that had bothered him in recent weeks. Freddie Burns moved to inside centre and brother Billy came in for his first Premiership start.

Despite this, the early signs looked promising. Burns junior was comfortable with his distribution and fellow debutant Steph Reynolds was hungry for work.

However, with several early decisions going against the Cherry and Whites, Worcester were quickly on the front foot and applying pressure on the Gloucester line.

A knock on from Matt Kvesic saw Gloucester having to defend a scrum from just five metres out, but an early shove from the Warriors eight let Nigel Davies' side off the hook.

And Gloucester then stunned the home crowd with a superb score. Billy Burns and Rob Cook chose to counter from near their own line, Jonny May got the ball in space, skinned Drauninui then Lamb and scored from 80 metres.

The second wasn't far behind and was similarly spectacular. Reynolds made the break this time from another thrilling counter attack. He was slowed up by the covering Pennell, but patient recycling saw Shane Monahan go over in the opposite corner.

It had been a fine start for Gloucester, but Ryan Lamb responded with a penalty on 20 minutes when Matt Kvesic was strangely penalised at the ruck for not releasing the tackled player when he hadn't actually made the tackle.

The response was immediate, and one for the forwards. Freddie Burns put a penalty into the corner, the pack set the rolling maul and Ben Morgan touched down. Burns landed his first conversion for a 17-3 lead.

Gloucester were rampant. Freddie Burns almost inspired a fourth with an intuitive break down the blindside but the cover defence just got back to haul down Shane Monahan.

The game wasn't won just yet though. More indiscipline gave Lamb the chance to work the corner and, on this occasion, the home side got the catch and drive spot on, Semisi Taulava claiming the try.

Gloucester were close again to their fourth try but, as half time approached, the game swung Worcester's way as Jonny May was yellow carded for playing the ball at the ruck.

Lamb again kicked to the corner, the pack rumbled close to the line before releasing the ball and Lamb darted over near the posts before converting his own try.

Gloucester's advantage had been reduced to a mere two points as the teams went into half time, an incredible turn of events given the momentum of the game.

However, for all Gloucester's attacking prowess, they were getting penalised at scrum time and the final few minutes of the half had seen the Warriors claw themselves back into the game.

The second half promised to be a cracker and weathering the period while down to 14 men would be crucial to Gloucester's chances of finishing the season on a winning note.

Nigel Davies made changes at half time. On came Huia Edmonds and Yann Thomas in a bid to influence the set piece battle and give Gloucester even more of a platform to build on.

The decisions continued to go against Gloucester in the opening stages of the second half, and more hard work in defence was called for until a fine break from Huia Edmonds moved play downfield.

The hooker was then denied a try when he intercepted a Worcester pass and scampered over, as referee Doyle called play back for a knock on. May returned and parity of numbers was restored.

However, the home team promptly took the lead. Pennell countered from deep to take play into the Gloucester half, where Lamb floated a cross kick to Drauniniu. The winger bobbed and weaved and eventually fought his way to the line. Lamb converted to give his side a 22-17 lead.

The fightback from the home side was commendable, but Gloucester still weren't done despite being on the receiving end of some bizarre refereeing decisions.

Shane Monahan was the catalyst as he charged down a David Lemi kick to establish vital field position, before the big ball carriers took over to send Jonny May diving over for his second. Burns added the extras for a 24-22 lead.

Predictably, referee Doyle still had a big part to play as, with 12 minutes to go, he yellow carded Rob Cook leaving Lamb with an easy penalty for a 25-24 lead. It was going to go right down to the wire.

Showing admirable spirit, Gloucester simply rolled up their sleeves and took the game back to Worcester, Tom Savage leading the charge, and a 74th minute penalty was the least they deserved.

Huia Edmonds was then inches away from finishing the game as a contest, but his attempted chip over the last man only found the defender's hands. Worcester duly moved downfield and Lamb kept his cool to stroke home a penalty.

So, just time enough for one last surge from Gloucester. A catch and drive looked destined to rumble over for the go ahead score. Worcester rolled the dice, pulled it down and the gamble paid off as the kick drifted wide.

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