

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2014

FRANKLIN'S GARDENS – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

NEW LOOK GLOUCESTER SUFFER TOUGH OPENING DAY DEFEAT
AT SAINTS

NORTHAMPTON SAINTS 53 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 6

It was a tough day at the office for Gloucester Rugby at Franklin's Gardens on Friday evening, as they ran into a powerful Northampton Saints side on top of their game, George North's hat-trick the highlight of a 53-6 home win.

It was a disappointing way to start the season, there can be no denying that. But one key message from Kingsholm throughout preseason has been that, with a number of new players and coaches, it will take Gloucester time to gel.

On Friday evening, they came up against a side who, conversely, have been together for a considerable period of time. The level of understanding between the Saints players was there for all to see, as was their confidence.

Northampton also took their chances clinically. They were helped on occasion by Gloucester gifting them some key field position. But they certainly made the most of it.

Credit, of course, to Northampton. They're the champions for a reason and picked up exactly where they left off last season.

Things had actually started in a reasonably promising manner for Gloucester. For 20 minutes or so, they more than played their part in a pulsating game of rugby. A penalty from Greig Laidlaw hit the bar and bounced clear, another from James Hook fell just short.

However, once Northampton hit their straps and scored a couple of tries, it became a long hard night for the Cherry and Whites.

David Humphreys and the rest of the coaching staff will have plenty to work on this week. But it is very early days. A number of players had their first taste of Aviva Premiership action on Friday evening and, painful as it was, they will be better players for it.

The key thing now is how the squad responds to tonight's defeat. Sale come to Kingsholm next Saturday, so there's no time to dwell overmuch on tonight's events.

The physical commitment from both sides couldn't be faulted in the opening stages, and the home crowd were enraged when George North was powerfully cleared out as he lurked around a ruck.

Ken Pisi gave Gloucester an alarm with a neat run down the right, only for his chip ahead to run dead and it was left to Stephen Myler to open the scores with a 13th minute penalty as Gloucester popped up at a scrum.

Greig Laidlaw had an immediate chance to level matters, but his well struck penalty from wide out on the left hit the crossbar and bounced clear. James Hook took over the kicking duties for the next one and nailed a beauty to level the scores.

This stung the home side into action and, although Gloucester defended stoutly around the fringes, a neat pass from Dickson reversed play and George North was able to score on the blindside. Myler added an excellent conversion for 10-3 after 23 minutes.

It was a time for Gloucester to dig deep and a long-range penalty from James Hook fell just short. And the Saints responded like champions with their second score.

An unfortunate accidental offside gifted the field position to Saints, but the chip over the top from Myler was sublime and George Pisi ran on to it to score under the posts. Myler converted for 17-3.

The Cherry and Whites had been hit with a pretty powerful one-two combination, but Greig Laidlaw calmed the nerves a little with a well struck 36th minute penalty.

It looked as though Gloucester had held out until half time but, with time up on the clock, a neat backs move saw George North loop outside the centres and break a tackle for his second try. Myler again converted.

It had been a real tale of taking chances. Gloucester had battled gamely, but had seen their hosts clinically create and convert try scoring opportunities. Northampton were playing with the confidence of a team who had won trophies last season.

Gloucester were enjoying nowhere near as much possession and having to work incredibly hard in defence. The try on the stroke of half time was a real blow and Gloucester would have to show real mental strength after the break.

Unfortunately, the home side were straight back on the offensive. Gloucester repelled one close range attack from the home forwards, but a scything break from James Wilson soon afterwards resulted in Luther Burrell scoring the fourth. Myler added the extras superbly.

Gloucester looked to battle their way back into things, but the home defence was superbly organised. The task got even tougher when Henry Trinder received what appeared to be a very harsh yellow card.

Northampton, now with superiority of numbers needed no second invitation. More powerful carrying up the middle opened up space out wide, and a lovely floated pass saw North complete his hat trick.

The home team were now running riot, the bonus point safely in the bag, and everything they were trying was coming off. A sixth try soon followed as Kahn Fotiali'i scampered down the blindside untouched.

The suffering didn't diminish in the closing stages. Jon Fisher scored on his Saints debut, while Luther Burrell was gifted a second.

It all added up to a sobering Friday evening for Gloucester.

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