

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2014

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP

GLOUCESTER JUST EDGED OUT BY CHIEFS IN NAIL-BITER
AT KINGSHOLM

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 22 EXETER CHIEFS 25

Gloucester started well and finished strongly, but paid the price for an indifferent middle third as Exeter took the spoils by 25 points to 22 at Kingsholm on Friday evening.

It was a game of mixed emotions for the Cherry and Whites. In front of a typically passionate crowd, they outscored their opponents by three tries to one yet finished adrift by three points in the final reckoning.

After a blistering start which saw them score two tries in the first 11 minutes, Gloucester were pegged back by a well drilled, efficient Chiefs who scored 25 unanswered points to what proved to be an insurmountable lead.

Director of Rugby David Humphreys had spoken during the week of the need to produce an 80 minute performance, and that was demonstrated by the evening's events.

Gloucester's inaccuracies enabled the Chiefs to take a grip on proceedings and, with kickers like Gareth Steenson and Henry Slade in their ranks, they needed no second invitation.

One encouraging aspect was the way that Gloucester battled their way back into proceedings. They did so last week against Sale and snatched the win. This time they came up just short.

The challenge now is to cut down on the mistakes that allowed Exeter to take a grip. As the performances become more complete, the wins will become more frequent.

The atmosphere was crackling by the time kick off arrived, with the Kingsholm crowd looking to get behind their side from the off. However, it was the visitors who drew first blood through a third minute Gareth Steenson penalty.

However, the Chiefs were promptly reduced to 14 men when Ian Whitten was adjudged to have taken Charlie Sharples out in the air as the winger took a high ball.

Gloucester duly exploited that flank as they attacked from deep, Tom Savage freeing Jonny May down the left. The winger left the first tackler for dead before chipping ahead and outpacing the cover to score a sensational try. 5-3 to Gloucester.

Gloucester had their tails up and scored their second almost immediately. Exeter kicked straight into touch having carried back into their own 22 to concede great field position. The rolling maul was perfect and Dan Murphy claimed the try. Laidlaw added a superb touchline conversion.

It had been a great few minutes for Gloucester. But the Chiefs regrouped and a second Steenson penalty made it 12-6 just as Whitten returned from the sin bin, and then 12-9 after 19 minutes with his third effort of the night.

Despite the two tries, Gloucester hadn't actually had much possession up to this point with the Chiefs playing a lot of good rugby. And the pressure told on 24 minutes as a scrum collapsed and Steenson nailed his fourth penalty to level the scores.

A theme was developing in terms of the indiscipline and, following another scrum collapse, Steenson was just short with another attempt at the posts, his long-range attempt dipping underneath the crossbar.

It had been all Steenson's boot, but the Chiefs stunned Gloucester on 33 minutes with a well worked blindside move that caught the defence napping. Gloucester got back to stop the initial surge, but flanker Ben White powered over from close range. Steenson converted for 12-19.

Gloucester simply couldn't string any phases together at this point, turnovers gifting possession back to the Chiefs. The flow of penalties continued and Henry Slade took over kicking duties to make it 12-22 after 37 minutes.

Half-time came with the Chiefs having scored 22 unanswered points to overturn a nine point deficit in impressive style.

Gloucester had started so brightly, but paid the price for coughing up possession far too frequently in the face of a blitz defence that lived on the offside line. Indiscipline was also a big issue and the visitors were making the most of the chances they had been given.

It very nearly got worse at the start of the second half. Exeter looked to have crossed for a scrappy third, but a forward pass was spotted in the build-up and the try chalked off.

However, Gloucester were dealt a blow moments later when Matt Kvesic was yellow carded for a tip tackle. Slade stepped up and boomed the kick over from several metres inside his own half for 12-25.

The 14 men dug deep, Sione Kalamafoni leading the way with a couple of bruising carries as the pack fronted up deep in the Chiefs 22.

However, referee Carley ended an advantage with Gloucester just a couple of metres from the Exeter line and the ball available, and came back for the penalty which Laidlaw missed.

The game had descended into something of a lull, the Chiefs happy to push Gloucester back deep into their own half, and the Cherry and Whites struggling to break the shackles.

As the game went into the final quarter, there was a glimmer of hope as May beat Nowell to a high ball and the backs shipped the ball right to give Sharples some running room. However, again, the offload went to an Exeter shirt.

It mattered not as Gloucester had a penalty, which went to the corner. The catch and drive was held out, but the Gloucester forwards hammered away and, eventually, Sione Kalamafoni battered his way over. Hook converted to make it 19-25 with 16 minutes to play.

Hook then landed a 72nd minute kick to get Gloucester back to within three points and it was everything to play for.

However, Exeter clinically and expertly took the steam out of the final few minutes and Gloucester never really threatened to draw level. In fact, the Chiefs could even afford to miss a last kick penalty and still head down the M5 with the points.

JC