

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2014**

**ALLIANZ PARK – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**GALLANT GLOUCESTER DEFEATED BUT NOT DISGRACED  
AT SARACENS**

**SARACENS 28 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 21**

At Allianz Park on Saturday afternoon, Gloucester gave it everything and were still within two points on the hour mark. However, a tendency to turn over possession cost them dear as Saracens muscled their way to a 28-21 win.

Before the game, Director of Rugby David Humphreys spoke of how this game would be a real litmus test in terms of Gloucester's progression so far this season.

Well, despite the defeat, he and his side can take real heart from their efforts at Allianz Park. Tom Savage's last gasp try clinched a losing bonus point but it could have been even better.

Gloucester stunned their hosts by taking a 13-3 lead in the first quarter, and then looked well set to extend the advantage only for a charge down to result in a fortunate score for the Men in Black.

It could really have knocked the wind out of Gloucester's sails, but they hung in there against a rejuvenated opponent. As the game went into the final quarter, it was a two point game.

However, a yellow card gave Saracens a numerical advantage that they would take full advantage of as they eased clear as the second half progressed. In contrast, Gloucester paid a price for not hanging on to possession when well placed.

The team spirit, though, was superb throughout. The defence dug in to prevent Saracens scoring a fourth try and this kept Gloucester in touch to secure the losing bonus point with Savage's late effort.

It was a decent return for Gloucester who are now set to focus on their European Rugby Challenge Cup campaign. The progression from week one to week six is clear for all to see. Things are moving in the right direction.

It was an ideal start for Gloucester who secured good field position when Saracens sliced their clearance from the kick off. The home side were then caught offside from the ensuing lineout and Greig Laidlaw opened the scoring.

The Cherry and Whites looked up for the challenge that lay ahead of them and were quickly back on the front foot. Morgan and Purdy both carried well before the home side were penalised again and Laidlaw doubled the advantage.

Saracens then lost Schalk Brits to injury but shrugged off the loss to apply their first pressure of the game. Gloucester's tackling was first class though and forced Chris Ashton into touch near the corner.

Gloucester couldn't get out of their own 22, and Saracens applied the squeeze. The defence was good, but a penalty was conceded for offside and Charlie Hodgson got his team on the scoreboard with a 14th minute penalty.

The Cherry and Whites did look good with ball in hand, though. Patient build up play followed, before Billy Twelvetrees' long cut out pass freed Rob Cook who outmuscled Ben Ransom to score the game's first try. Laidlaw added an excellent conversion.

It was a well-crafted try but Saracens hit straight back through a real moment of luck. Twelvetrees' chip over the top was charged down on halfway by Chris Wyles who re-gathered to score under the posts. Hodgson converted and it was back to 10-13.

It was a boost that the home side needed, and the second try wasn't far behind. Patience was again a virtue as Sarries built the phases until Ernst Joubert was able to free Alistair Hargreaves who beat John Afoa to the corner. 15-13 after 26 minutes.

Gloucester regrouped and slowly worked way back into the game. The pack was fronting up, Tom Palmer was superb, the back three were chasing and competing well for kicks, and a promising backs move almost unlocked the home defence again.

Billy Twelvetrees then had a chance to regain the lead as he lined up a penalty from several metres inside his own half, but the ambitious effort drifted wide. There was no further incident of note before half time, so the home side took a 15-13 lead into the dressing rooms.

Gloucester could consider themselves a little unlucky to be trailing. They'd looked very confident with ball in hand and scored a very well worked try. However, frustratingly, they trailed mainly due to the misfortune of a charge down.

There were signs of Saracens going through the gears but, largely, Gloucester were doing a good job of knocking them out of their stride and silencing the home crowd.

Sarries came out for the second half obviously meaning business, and Gloucester were quickly on the back foot, although one massive double hit from Hibbard and Kalamafoni sent Brad Barritt back where he came from.

Gloucester's defence was again looking solid but, on 48 minutes, they were harshly penalised for a deliberate knock on and Charlie Hodgson extended the lead to 18-13.

Bizarrely, Chris Ashton was then immediately pulled up for exactly the same offence as Gloucester disrupted a Saracens scrum and Greig Laidlaw had no problem trimming the gap to two points again, before Twelvetrees was again off target with another long-distance effort.

Gloucester were then dealt a blow as a knock on near the Saracens 22 provided good counter attack ball. The scramble defence got back but Nick Wood was yellow carded for a block off the ball.

And superiority in numbers quickly told, although there looked to be a knock on by Vunipola in the build-up. But a slick offload by Hargreaves found the ever-eager Ashton on his shoulder in support and the winger was under the posts. Hodgson converted for 25-16 as the game edged into the final quarter.

The fly half then extended the lead with his third penalty of the afternoon, and Saracens poured forward in a bid to score their fourth try and clinch the bonus point.

But Gloucester held firm. In fact, they did more than that. With time up on the clock, they chanced their arm and took the game to Saracens.

The ball went through several pairs of hands before James Hook's offload found the charging Tom Savage and, despite a despairing tap tackle, the second row made the line to ensure that Gloucester went home with something to show for their efforts.

JC