

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2014

KINGSTON PARK – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

FALCONS TAKE THE SPOILS IN ARM WRESTLE AT KINGSTON PARK

NEWCASTLE FALCONS 20 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 10

Kingston Park has not been the happiest hunting ground for Gloucester in recent times, and so it proved again on Friday evening as, despite a great start, Newcastle ran out winners by 20 points to 10.

It was always going to be a tough prospect for Gloucester who came into the game missing 17 players due to illness, injury and international duty. And, by half time, the Cherry and Whites had lost three more to head injuries.

So, it was a massively reshuffled and inexperienced team who finished the game, but they battled to the very last whistle.

On the night, no-one could fault the effort that was put in. There was a lack of accuracy and execution at times and, in hindsight, the three points for a penalty would probably have been taken rather than kicking for the corner.

It all added up to a fairly frustrating 80 minutes on the road. The majority of the refereeing decisions went the way of the Falcons who, with one exception, didn't really stress Gloucester in defence.

However, that one chance was taken during a very key five minute spell. It came straight after half time, with Gloucester only trailing narrowly and with the elements now at their backs.

It was a time to play the game in the Newcastle half, but the Falcons came away with ten crucial points and the gap proved to be just too much for Gloucester to close.

Rory Clegg kept the scoreboard ticking over throughout with some timely penalties and the Falcons defence did the rest.

Gloucester will lick their wounds and look to bounce back. Next week they will welcome back a number of key players from international duty and the fixture at London Irish takes on great significance.

For now, it's a case of wondering what might have been amidst the wind and rain of Kingston Park.

It was actually a dream start for Gloucester. The kick off pinned the Falcons back, Matt Kvesic charged down Rory Clegg's clearance and John Afoa touched down. 26 seconds had elapsed. Billy Burns added a superb conversion.

However, the joy of the early score was quickly tempered as Charlie Sharples stayed down after making a big defensive hit. The winger didn't move for a while and was finally helped off, Tom Isaacs taking his place.

Gloucester looked lively and were trying to play at a high tempo. However, a penalty awarded for crossing gave Rory Clegg an 8th minute penalty attempt, which hit the post and stayed out.

The home side charged down the restart though, Billy Burns was penalised for holding on and Clegg made no mistake with his second attempt of the evening.

The Falcons started to get some momentum, and the penalty count started to rise against Gloucester. A dropped scrum on 17 minutes went against the Cherry and Whites and Clegg made it a 7-6 game.

Four minutes later, and Clegg nudged his side into the lead as more penalties gave the Falcons territory and then an easy shot at goal. It was obvious that Gloucester needed to sort their discipline out.

Unfortunately, the next incident of note saw the Cherry and Whites lose scrum half Dan Robson to injury, Callum Braley entering the fray on 25 minutes. It was a time for Gloucester to dig deep and re-group.

To their credit, Gloucester tried to play some expansive rugby but got little change out of a resolute home defence. The decisions were also favouring the home side, which was hurting Gloucester's efforts to get into the game.

Some dogged defence was called for from the Cherry and Whites as half time approached, but Gloucester held and went into half time trailing by just the two points at 9-7.

It hadn't been a classic, and it was frustrating that Gloucester hadn't built on their gift score. However, they were battling hard, working to overcome the two injuries, and were still in this.

Playing in the right areas of the pitch was going to be vital in the second half. Gloucester would need to be in the Newcastle half to create the required scoring opportunities.

A tough task was made even tougher at half time, however. Henry Purdy became the third back to be lost to injury. Aled Thomas was the replacement as Gloucester reshuffled.

But, before they could settle, a penalty was conceded and Clegg made it 12-7. Worse quickly followed as the Falcons strung together their best phase play of the game. Socino made the key break and Sinoti Sinoti scored on the right.

Gloucester tried to fight back. One long range penalty from Billy Burns dipped just under the crossbar, but he made no mistake on 56 minutes with one from much closer in.

Once again though, Newcastle responded with a penalty from Clegg. Referee Wigglesworth got the biggest cheer of the night for yellow carding James Hudson and the home fly-half did the rest.

Lady Luck certainly wasn't smiling on the Cherry and Whites. Burns tried to get his side back into losing bonus point range a couple of minutes later and struck the ball well, but the post came to the Falcons' rescue.

The final few minutes saw Gloucester throw the kitchen sink at the home side who, to their credit, defended their line with passion and not always legally.

McColl and Aled Thomas both came close. Andy Saull was yellow carded, and a Gloucester rolling maul which looked set to drive over was pulled down without further punishment being incurred.

Gloucester had a couple of eminently kickable penalties which would have earned a losing bonus point. However, youthful enthusiasm saw penalties kicked to the corner and the Cherry and Whites came up empty handed.

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