

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2014**

MADEJSKI STADIUM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

GLOUCESTER BATTLE TO IMPORTANT PREMIERSHIP WIN  
AT LONDON IRISH

LONDON IRISH 9 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 21

It may not have been pretty at times, but Gloucester worked their socks off at the Madejski Stadium on Sunday afternoon, tries from Henry Purdy and Steve McColl paving the way for a 21-9 win over London Irish.

After two league defeats in a row in the past two weeks, games Gloucester could easily have won, it was important that the Cherry and Whites got back to winning ways, which they duly did after a hard-fought encounter in Reading.

In truth, it was a tense and nervy affair with both sides struggling to gain the ascendancy. But Gloucester crucially got their noses in front before defending their lead like demons.

Greig Laidlaw kept the scoreboard kicking over with the boot, as he so often does, and contributed 11 points to the cause. But it was the tries from two of Gloucester's summer signings, Henry Purdy and Steve McColl, that proved to be the difference.

Gloucester, by their own admission, still have plenty to work on but the win, Gloucester's fourth in succession at the Madejski, will be morale boosting ahead of the European double header against Zebre.

With the likes of Jonny May, Ben Morgan and Billy Twelvetrees due back from England duty this week, Gloucester can now focus on continuing to develop and move forward as a group.

Gloucester were forced to make a late change to their matchday 23, Shaun Knight coming in for James Gibbons. For the home side, George Skivington was a late withdrawal.

It was a fairly uninspiring opening first ten minutes, with neither side really able to gain the upper hand. Handling mistakes were made by both sides as well as penalties conceded.

Gloucester started well, but soon found themselves pinned back near their own line. They had to defend a 5-metre lineout, before packing down for a series of scrums just metres from their own line, eventually winning a free kick to relieve the pressure.

The first quarter came and went without a score from either side. Tom Savage made a powerful break into the Irish 22 which deserved a better outcome, but anxious hands saw the ball passed direct into touch. Richard Hibbard was then held up over the line after a good catch and drive.

The attacking 5 scrum was a real opportunity but, after a series of resets, Gloucester were frustratingly driven off their own put in and penalised to the delight of the sparse home crowd.

The next chance came courtesy of a lovely cross kick from James Hook which found Henry Purdy in space on the left wing, but the winger couldn't get his pass away and Irish smothered the opportunity.

Finally, after 35 minutes, the first score came. Gloucester had a driving maul pulled down as they got momentum up in the Irish half and Greig Laidlaw kicked an excellent penalty.

It finally broke the deadlock and, predictably, the Exiles almost immediately had a chance to respond. But, with no time left on the clock, Shane Geraghty was short and wide with a long-range effort.

It had been far from the most enthralling spectacle, but Gloucester did at least hold a narrow lead. They'd been playing the game in the right areas, they now needed to put more points on the board to open up a gap while also keeping the home side at bay. A big 40 minutes lay ahead.

Things started well. Laidlaw smacked a long-range penalty off the post, but made no mistake a minute or so later to double the lead.

Then came a key moment. Gloucester snaffled turnover ball at a ruck and went blindside. Atkinson found McColl, and the full-back's swift hands freed Henry Purdy who slipped a despairing cover tackle to score.

Laidlaw failed to convert from the touchline but Gloucester had an 11-0 lead. A period of consolidation would have been ideal, but Geraghty immediately hit back with two penalties in quick succession and it was very much game on.

Nerve ends may have been jangling as the game reached the hour mark, but not for Greig Laidlaw. He kicked a penalty after a good scrum for 14-6, only for Geraghty to respond in kind a minute or so later.

Things were incredibly tight, and it was coming down to small margins. None more so then when Tom Savage charged down a kick but couldn't quite reach the ball before it went dead.

The tension grew. Gloucester found themselves pinned back once again, defending 5 metre lineouts, but a steal from Tom Palmer saved the day momentarily as did a penalty won on the floor by Matt Kvesic.

But Gloucester all but made the game safe on 72 minutes.

Having moved downfield mainly due to Charlie Sharples competing superbly for a high kick, James Hook threaded an inch perfect grubber through for Steve McColl to gather and score his first Premiership try. Laidlaw converted and Gloucester had room to breathe.

The Exiles didn't let up as they sought a score to get back within striking distance, but Gloucester were in no mood to gift wrap even a losing bonus point despite losing Tom Savage to a harsh yellow card for what was judged to be a late tackle on Shane Geraghty.

The tackles rained in, the breakdown was competitive and Irish didn't really come close to crossing the line. Gloucester will take pride from keeping their line intact and reflect upon a job well done as they head home with the points.

JC