

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2014**

**KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**GLOUCESTER GROUND DOWN BY PRAGMATIC BATH  
PERFORMANCE**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 16 BATH RUGBY 39**

On a tough evening at Kingsholm, Gloucester could escape neither a suffocating Bath defence, nor the whistle of referee Greg Garner as six penalties and a penalty try paved the way to a 39-16 win for the visitors.

It was a performance where you couldn't accuse Gloucester of a lack of effort, far from it. In fact, the Cherry and Whites may even have edged the possession and territory stats. It's a cliché, but the score-line probably didn't reflect the balance of play.

However, painful as it may be for anyone connected with Gloucester Rugby to admit, they came up against a Bath side who were simply better on the day.

Employing a stifling defence and utilising the dead eye goal-kicking of George Ford as the main offensive weapon, Bath had the winning formula. At one point, Gloucester went through something like 28 phases of possession in the Bath 22 and came away with nothing to show for their efforts.

But possibly the main talking point of the afternoon, sadly, was the scrum. It's become something of a blight on the modern game, and barely a scrum was completed throughout the 80 minutes.

It seemed to be pretty much tit for tat in terms of decisions for a while, and Bath very much benefitted from conceding penalties which were just out of goal-kicking range.

But eventually, the inevitable yellow card was shown, to Sila Puafisi unfortunately, and the game swung decisively Bath's way. There was no way back for Gloucester as Bath cashed in.

It added up to a deeply frustrating afternoon for Gloucester in front of a capacity Kingsholm crowd. It was a harsh lesson but it will be a worthwhile one should the team emerge better from it, even if it won't feel that way tonight.

Gloucester will lick their wounds over the Christmas period, but there's not too much time to dwell on things with Wasps coming to Kingsholm on December 28th. The Cherry and Whites will be determined to finish 2014 on a high.

The home side entered the field of play to a tremendous reception and, to the delight of the home crowd, took an early 3-0 lead. Bath went to ground at a ruck on their 22 and Greig Laidlaw did the rest.

However, the visitors were quickly back on terms, Jonny May penalised for holding on in the tackle and George Ford, although the strike didn't look clean, bisected the posts.

Gloucester responded with some fine build up play, the forwards carrying the ball with real intent and purpose. However, Bath's defence, though stressed, was up to the mark and James Hook was forced to attempt a drop goal which drifted wide.

Laidlaw then had a chance to regain the lead as Stuart Hooper took out Charlie Sharples after a kick ahead. However, his long-range penalty attempt, probably out of his range, was short of the target.

The Scotland scrum half made immediate amends. Gloucester forced a penalty out of the Bath pack at scrum time and Laidlaw had an easy kick. Once again, Ford immediately responded in kind. 6-6 after 19 minutes.

Ford then gave his side the lead for the first time with his third penalty, maintaining his 100% record, as referee Garner determined that Gloucester were to blame this time for a scrum collapse, and then repeated the dose for same offence and a 12-6 advantage on 29 minutes.

It was rapidly becoming a tale of the kicking tee, and things continued to go Bath's way. Gloucester were actually the beneficiaries of the next decision but it was a long way out again. Twelvetrees stepped up but also didn't have the range.

Finally Gloucester got on the scoreboard, again for a penalty at scrum time, as Laidlaw's kick scraped over the bar. Frustratingly, Ford immediately hit back with another of his own.

It left Bath holding a 9-15 advantage at half time, with hardly a try scoring chance to mention for either side. The game hadn't really got going and the goal kickers were proving to be the key players.

Up to this point, Ford had been immaculate off the tee, slotting absolutely everything. However, Gloucester, despite enjoying the better of the territory, had left a few points out there.

The potential comeback had to happen without John Afoa, the tight-head prop replaced by Sila Puafisi at half time. The Cherry and Whites piled on the pressure straight from the off but were held at bay by the visitors.

In fact, Bath managed a turnover and moved downfield to conjure up another kicking chance for Ford but, for once, the fly half was off target to let Gloucester off the hook.

However, he made no mistake on 50 minutes, yet another scrum penalty the reason, and Bath had some breathing room at 9-18. Gloucester received a lengthy lecture from referee Garner.

And that lecture had real significance six minutes later, when another scrum hit the deck and Sila Puafisi was shown the yellow card.

Now a man to the good in the pack, Bath sensed blood. Ford kicked to the corner, the pack set the driving maul and, although Gloucester desperately tried to dig in, the momentum was too great and a penalty try was awarded. Ford added the extras.

Try as they might, Gloucester simply couldn't crack the Bath defence, despite enjoying some good possession and territory.

They simply couldn't get through, or around, the blue, back and white line and bad then went to worse as Bath moved downfield, turned the screw and Matt Garvey touched down from close range. Ford continued his excellent day and converted.

Ford's conversion made it 9-32 and the result was decided. There was still time though for some defiance from Gloucester as Dan Robson scampered down the blindside to finally cross the Bath line. Hook added a superb touchline conversion.

However, Bath still managed to have the last word. Under pressure near their own line, Gloucester conceded possession and that man Garvey completed an unlikely double as he again touched down to complete a good day at the office for the men from the Rec.

JC