

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, JANUARY 17, 2015

KINGSHOLM – EUROPEAN RUGBY CHALLENGE CUP

**GLOUCESTER CLINCH POOL 5 WITH HARD FOUGHT WIN
OVER DOGGED OYONNAX**

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 33 OYONNAX 3

The damage was done in the first half at Kingsholm on Saturday afternoon as Gloucester clinched pool 5 of the European Rugby Challenge Cup with a 33-3 victory over battling Oyonnax.

Three tries in the first 12 minutes, and the try scoring bonus point in the bag by half time meant that the game was effectively over after 40 minutes. However, possibly the worst thing for Gloucester's momentum was having the five points secured as the second half was a real non-event.

To be fair to Oyonnax, who had nothing left to play for, they battled proudly in the second half and had more than their fair share of possession and territory. However, they couldn't take advantage and one positive from Gloucester's second half was keeping their line intact.

Dan Robson crossed late on to prevent a scoreless second period, but all the action occurred in the first 40 minutes as Gloucester efficiently secured top spot in pool 5.

One pool match remains – away at Brive on Thursday evening. It's five wins from five in Europe so far and Gloucester will be looking to make it a perfect record in the group stages. However, Brive will defend their home turf proudly.

Gloucester got off to a flying start on the day. They applied real pressure in the Oyonnax 22, before a lovely grubber kick bounced up beautifully for Billy Burns to gather and score. Greig Laidlaw converted.

Oyonnax responded with a Regis Lespinas penalty, but a barnstorming run from Richard Hibbard immediately paved the way for Gloucester's second. Slick hands shipped the ball wide and Mark Atkinson showed quick hands to put Jonny May over. Laidlaw converted again.

Two tries from European debutants. It was a great opening for Gloucester, but better was still to come as the Cherry and Whites kept their collective foot on the gas pedal.

May was on fire and turned provider. His counter attack off a long kick tore the Oyonnax defence to shreds. David Halaifonua took it on before releasing Mark Atkinson to finish it. 19-3 after 12 minutes.

The first three tries had come so easily for Gloucester that the main cause for concern was that concentration might be lost. Chances were carved out in the next few minutes but none taken as the visitors dug in.

In fact, the visitors threatened next as Gloucester indiscipline gave them a chance to launch a catch and drive, but the home defence muscled up and kept their line intact.

An Oyonnax turnover then gave Gloucester the chance to counter from their own 22. Visiting full-back Adriaan Smit carried over his line to give the Cherry and Whites a great attacking platform and they didn't waste it.

The scrum collapsed several times and referee McMenemy lectured the visiting front row. It went down again and it was a penalty try. Laidlaw converted and Gloucester had the bonus point try and a 26-3 half time lead.

With the game seemingly won, the challenge now was for Gloucester to maintain their focus. Changes were bound to take place with the coaches looking to rest key players. Would the momentum be affected?

In fact, half time saw the first replacement as Jonny May made way for Steve McColl as Gloucester resumed playing towards the JS Security Stand. However, the first few minutes of the half passed by in a flurry of set pieces.

Credit to Oyonnax, they were battling hard and a fine run from Dug Cudjo very nearly led to their first try. However, in truth, the steam had gone out of the game somewhat as the hour mark approached.

The visitors kept on going, seemingly determined to at least leave Kingsholm with a try. However, Gloucester were dead set to keep the French side out and achieved their goal.

Just as everyone thought that the second half would finish pointless, Gloucester finally broke through. Ross Moriarty showed great willing to chase a long kick downfield and forced a knock on from the final covering Oyonnax defender.

It gave Gloucester a final attacking platform and replacement scrum half Dan Robson, playing out of position on the wing, darted between two would be tacklers to complete the scoring.

Job done and on to Brive.

JC