

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

THURSDAY, JANUARY 22, 2015

STADE AMÉDÉE DOMENECH – EUROPEAN RUGBY CHALLENGE CUP

GLOUCESTER MAKE IT SIX FROM SIX IN EUROPE WITH VICTORY
AT BRIVE

CA BRIVE 20 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 31

It was a bit of an arm wrestle at times, but two tries in each half did the trick for Gloucester as they defeated CA Brive by 31 points to 20 at the Stade Amédée-Domenech on Thursday evening to secure top seeding for the quarter-finals.

In a game that saw four yellow cards brandished by referee Dudley Phillips, the Cherry and Whites continued their unbeaten run in 2015, as they outmuscled a home side keen not to take a backwards step in front of their vociferous home crowd.

David Humphreys, Laurie Fisher and Co. will be thrilled to have tasted victory again on the road, and being able to stand down some key players when the result was in the bag thanks to a pair of first half tries from Matt Kvesic and an excellently worked score for Dan Robson.

The hosts did mount a spirited second half fight after a penalty try was awarded to both sides, but a second Kvesic try put the game to bed.

All eyes will turn to the other round six games across the European Rugby Challenge Cup, as the quarter final opponents will become clear.

Gloucester made a strong start and quickly made inroads into the Brive half. However, a knock-on in midfield allowed Brive to break through Bezy. The defence got back, but the home side had territory and a penalty for offside from Swanepoel opened the scoring after 7 minutes.

Aggressive kick chase and defence gave the Cherry and Whites a chance to level things up but, from out wide on the right, James Hook pulled his kick across the face of the posts.

However, two minutes later, Billy Burns almost darted though on the Brive 22. The home side killed the ball and Hook was on target from almost bang in front to level the scores on 14 minutes.

The game entered a phase where errors ruled the roost. However, the home side edged back in front when Gloucester went in at the side of a ruck after Dan Robson took a high ball well. Swanepoel kicked an excellent penalty.

Gloucester's reply was instant and decisive. Twelvetree's grubber forced a five metre lineout, the catch and drive was well executed and the try duly followed for Matt Kvesic. Hook converted for 6-10.

Swanepoel dragged a penalty wide from the next phase of play and Gloucester punished him with a quickly taken 22 drop out that led to a length of the field try.

Henry Purdy exploited the 5 metre channel superbly, and found Mark Atkinson inside in support. The big centre broke a tackle, then rolled a lovely grubber through for Dan Robson to control and score. Hook converted and it was a much more comfortable looking 6-17 lead for the Cherry and Whites.

There was a superb chance to extend that lead as Brive prop Pat Barnard was yellow carded with Gloucester five metres out. However, possession was lost and the home team cleared their lines.

After a fairly tense first 25 minutes, Gloucester could feel relatively pleased with the lead. Two excellent tries had been scored with only a touch of indiscipline a cause for concern.

The missed opportunity before half time was frustrating, but Gloucester seemed to have this one under control if they could maintain their focus and keep up the intensity.

However, the intensity was a little too over the top in the first couple of minutes as David Halaifonua put in another huge defensive hit, this time an illegal one, and the Tongan was yellow carded.

He was quickly followed to the sinbin by replacement Brive prop Asieshvili as the home team's woes at scrum time continued and tempers threatened to boil over.

It went from bad to worse for the home side. Gloucester forced another five-metre scrum and this time didn't squander it; a huge shove resulting in a penalty try. Hook converted and it was 6-24. The home crowd were not impressed . . .

There was almost an instant reply from Brive as Guillaume Namy pounced on a loose pass from Dan Robson, but Henry Purdy made a superb tackle to haul down the winger and save the day.

However, there was no escape on 56 minutes as the Cherry and Whites were adjudged to have illegally hauled down a catch and drive and the penalty try was given. Swanepoel converted for 13-24.

It was a different atmosphere now as a Brive break from deep took play deep into the Gloucester 22. James Hook played the ball in an offside position and was the latest to be shown yellow. It was a time for cool heads.

Gloucester survived the period with Hook in the bin and came very close to the bonus point try, but the game was pretty scrappy by now with turnovers galore from both sides.

However, with time ebbing away, Gloucester strung together enough phases for Matt Kvesic to power over for his second of the evening and secure the try scoring bonus point. Hook added the extras.

Credit to the home side, they had the final word as they kept going right until the very end, earning a consolation try for replacement hooker Thomas Acquier. Nicolas Bezy converted to bring proceedings to a halt.

It was a strong performance on the road by the Cherry and Whites who continue to display grit away from home, but with Brive playing for just pride, the result still had to be earned by the Cherry and Whites who now turn their attention to the LV= Cup before returning to Aviva Premiership action in a fortnight's time.

JC