

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, JANUARY 31, 2015

KINGSHOLM – LV= CUP

**GLOUCESTER HANG ON FOR BONUS POINT LV=CUP WIN
OVER OSPREYS**

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 32 OSPREYS 25

Gloucester and the Ospreys served up an entertaining LV= Cup encounter at Kingsholm on Saturday afternoon, a youthful home side running out 32-25 winners.

In bitterly cold conditions, it's a victory that takes Gloucester to the top of their pool for the time being, although Saracens and Newport Gwent Dragons have yet to play this weekend.

But, whatever their results, Gloucester are still very much in the hunt in terms of semi-final qualification with one round left to play.

The Cherry and Whites led from start to finish, although the Ospreys were never entirely out of the game and kept things interesting right up until the final whistle. To their credit, they came to play rugby and were good value for their bonus point.

But Gloucester had just enough about them to keep their opponents at bay and close out the win, no mean feat considering they had three schoolboys on the pitch at the final whistle.

Five wins in a row in all competitions mean that it will be a buoyant Gloucester camp who will prepare for next weekend's game against Harlequins and, in front of another passionate Kingsholm crowd, who knows what will happen?

Gloucester started in ambitious fashion. Good interplay led to a penalty in the Ospreys 22, and Billy Burns kicked for the corner. The catch and corner was just held out[*sic*], but the ball was quickly moved right and Aled Thomas came into the line to score. Billy Burns converted for 7-0 after only five minutes.

A second try almost followed shortly afterwards as Gloucester applied pressure through a couple of powerful five metre scrums, but a knock on near the line ended the threat with the Ospreys at full stretch.

The forwards though had the taste for it up front. Another kick to the corner set up a second catch and drive opportunity. This one looked set to result in a try, but was halted illegally and a penalty try was the decision. Burns had an easy conversion as a result.

It had been a rough opening for the visitors, but they regrouped and opened their account with a 22nd minute penalty from Sam Davies as their pack earned a penalty at a set scrum.

And things got better for the Ospreys on 25 minutes. Gloucester looked set to counter from deep, but Darren Dawidiuk's pass was picked off by centre Ben John and he ran it home untouched. Davies converted for 14-10.

Gloucester hit back with some more powerful work from the pack. A solid scrum allowed Billy Meakes to smash the ball up towards the shadow of the posts where Ospreys scrum-half Tom Habberfield killed the ball and was sinbinned. Burns kicked the easy three points.

Davies had an immediate chance to respond from long range, but his well struck attempt struck the upright and bounced clear. The fly half was on target though after 37 minutes to narrow the gap to 17-13.

Davies then turned villain as he was yellow carded for interfering with the ball at a ruck. This left the back line short of numbers as Gloucester sought to press home the advantage, and Aled Thomas unselfishly put Ollie Thorley in for his first senior try.

The Cherry and Whites went in at half time with a decent 22-13 lead, especially as they'd been playing into the wind. A strong start was underdone a bit by the interception but the third try, on the stroke of half time, was a welcome boost.

Aleki Lutui replaced Darren Dawidiuk at half time, and Lewis Ludlow came on for Ross Moriarty after the back rower took a heavy blow in a tackle after 45 minutes as the second half got off to a disrupted start. Thankfully Moriarty walked off under his own steam.

However, Gloucester got the try scoring bonus point as soon as the game resumed. Richard Fussell's attempted clearance was charged down by Dan Thomas and the back rower gathered to score. Burns added an excellent conversion.

Both sides started to ring the changes and some of the fizz went out of the game as the new players settled into proceedings.

And it was the visitors who struck on the hour mark. A period of pressure near the Gloucester line eventually saw Richard Fussell break a tackle and just make the line. Davies added an excellent conversion to narrow the gap to 29-20.

The Cherry and Whites needed to settle the game down a bit, and Aled Thomas did to a certain extent with a 66th minute penalty. However, a Davies cross kick immediately found Tom Grabham for a try and it was 32-25 going into the final ten minutes.

Aleki Lutui was yellow carded after the restart, and it was all Ospreys in terms of momentum. The Gloucester defence was really put to the test but everyone, especially the youngsters, fronted up.

For all their possession and territory, the visitors were kept at bay in the closing stages as excellent defence forced them back time and again.

It was a good day at the office for Gloucester as a whole and, for some of the younger members of the team, quite a learning experience in a unique classroom environment.

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