

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2015

KINGSHOLM – LV= CUP

GLOUCESTER KEEP LV=CUP ALIVE WITH IMPRESSIVE QUINS WIN

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 25 HARLEQUINS 7

Gloucester's young guns took on an arguably more experienced opponent in Harlequins on Saturday afternoon and delivered a well-deserved and impressive 25-7 win to keep their LV= Cup semi-final hopes alive.

It's a win that takes Gloucester back to the top of the pool, their third win from four LV= Cup matches this season. But semi-final qualification now hinges on Saracens slipping up at home to Exeter on Sunday.

All Gloucester could do was take care of their own business, and they did that in some style. Against an opponent who boasted several players with significant Premiership experience, a young Cherry and White did themselves proud on the day.

They took the game to the visitors from the off, and Conor O'Shea's side looked a tad rattled in the opening stages. However, perhaps Gloucester's only failing in that 40 minutes was not making more of their chances.

When Ugo Monye crossed with the last play of the first half, Harlequins were right back in the game. The visitors sensed that and came out all guns blazing in the second half.

Another score could have changed the whole face of the game but, crucially, Gloucester held out after a torrid few minutes and went on to dominate the final half hour.

That dominance was based upon an increasingly powerful effort at the set scrum. It paved the platform for an armchair ride in the final quarter for the half-backs, and it was slightly frustrating that Gloucester couldn't quite get the try scoring bonus point.

However, it's job done for the time being. Gloucester can look back on their LV= Cup campaign with a degree of pride. They've embraced the goals of the tournament and blooded a number of young players who have acquitted themselves very well indeed.

Their LV= Cup destiny is now out of their hands, but Gloucester can travel to Welford Road next weekend on the resumption of the Aviva Premiership on the back of six wins with a spring in their step.

On a cold, damp afternoon at Kingsholm Aled Thomas got Gloucester off to a good start with a well-struck penalty after four minutes. For the young Cherry and Whites, it was an encouraging opening.

The visitors, boasting considerably more experience in their line-up, responded quickly and put Gloucester under some pressure, one grubber from Ben Botica posing problems but just rolling too far.

Bill Meakes was determined to get into the action. The centre put in one massive hit in midfield to level Jordan Turner-Hall and was then stopped just short down the left flank.

It was a brief respite for the visitors. Gloucester set the catch and drive nicely, powered forward and Dan Thomas claimed the score. Aled Thomas added the conversion for a 10-0 lead as a groggy looking Turner-Hall left the field.

It was a massively encouraging opening quarter for Gloucester, who were taking the game to their opponents and went on to threaten a couple more times but conceded penalties in the Quins 22 when well placed.

However, the Cherry and Whites did extend their lead on 32 minutes, Aled Thomas adding three points as the pack forced a penalty at scrum time. It wasn't his cleanest struck penalty ever, but it went over!

So, it was somewhat against the run of play when Quins got on to the scoreboard on the stroke of half time.

Indiscipline allowed the visitors to move into the Gloucester 22, and Karl Dickson started to pull the strings.

Eventually, Quins worked an overlap on the left and Ross Chisholm put Ugo Monye into the corner. Botica added an excellent touchline conversion.

So, Gloucester led at half time but would have been thinking that the margin should have been greater. Quins had created one real chance and taken it clinically. The second half was poised nicely.

It was defensive duties first up for Gloucester in the opening few minutes. Quins had come out fired up and started to get their passing and offloading game going. It was all hands to the pumps time.

But, having soaked up a ton of pressure, Gloucester went downfield and scored. Aled Thomas made the initial break before the pack took it on. They stayed patient for several phases before Jacob Rowan burrowed over under the posts. Aled Thomas converted.

The Gloucester scrum was now really starting to get on top and the Kingsholm crowd were loving it. However, the score that would really kill this game off remained elusive as the game went into the final quarter.

That was until Bill Meakes burst powerfully through the midfield defence. The centre had the presence of mind to offload to the supporting Steph Reynolds and the winger scorched home to open up a 25-7 lead.

Gloucester poured forward in the final stages, desperately looking for the fourth try. Reynolds very nearly had it, but was just tackled into touch by Jordan Burns as he sped down the wing.

Overall, however, Gloucester can look back on a job very well done on the day.

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