

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2015**

WELFORD ROAD – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

TIGERS EDGE THE KICKING DUEL AS LEICESTER SNEAK  
AN 18-15 VICTORY

LEICESTER TIGERS 18 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 15

Freddie Burns kicked six penalties to five from James Hook as Gloucester battled like titans only to be denied by a controversial refereeing decision which saw the game swing decisively the way of the home team.

The Tigers edged it by 18 points to 15, but no-one would really have denied Gloucester a draw such was their contribution to an encounter which went right to the wire.

In the end, it swung on small margins, the key one being the yellow card brandished to Charlie Sharples on 70 minutes. Freddie Burns punished the indiscretion with his sixth penalty, and it proved to be the key contribution.

Defeat was harsh on a Gloucester outfit who fought tooth and nail. Commitment and defence on the night couldn't be faulted. A losing bonus point is no disgrace but it could have been more.

In fact, had the Cherry and Whites not had a first half try ruled out for a forward pass, the outcome could have been so different.

But, after tasting defeat for the first time in 2015, the challenge now is to regroup ahead of the visit of London Welsh next weekend. It's a game Gloucester must win to keep in touch with the top of the table.

A late change forced a reshuffle. David Haliafonua failed a fitness test and Billy Burns came in to face brother Freddie for the first time.

Gloucester began well. But, after a decent opening, a wonky lineout throw gave the Tigers a scrum in Gloucester territory. The scrum went down, the Cherry and Whites were penalised and Freddie Burns made it 3-0 to the home side.

Gloucester were quickly back on level terms as the Tigers illegally disrupted a rolling maul, James Hook slotting the penalty, but Burns promptly made it 6-3 after a lineout infringement.

It was apparent, even at this early stage, that the main tactic from the home side was the up and under. Several bombs rained down on the Gloucester back three with mixed results.

And when the chasers after one such kick were too quick out of the blocks and ruled offside, James Hook punished the error with a long-range penalty.

Gloucester then had a genuine chance to break the try scoring duck as they forced a five metre scrum. The Tigers survived, but at the expense of a penalty, and Hook duly made it 6-9 after 26 minutes.

The Cherry and Whites had their tails up and unfortunately had a try chalked off on 28 minutes. Freddie Burns was caught in possession, Bill Meakes took the loose ball on but Purdy's pass to Mark Atkinson was ruled forward.

A number of marginal decisions then went the way of the home side, allowing them to move downfield and Burns levelled the scores after 35 minutes with his third penalty of the evening.

The calls continued to go the Tigers' way and this gave the home side a real chance to take the lead on the verge of half time, However, Gloucester's red zone defence was superb and earned a key turnover to relieve the pressure.

So, honours even at half time and a real arm wrestle at Welford Road. It had been a tale of the kickers on the scoreboard but it had been a pulsating encounter to date, full of commitment if not quality.

Gloucester had enjoyed some good moments in attack, and could count themselves unlucky not to have crossed the line. If they could execute at key moments then this game was very much in the balance.

However, it was the hosts who made a good start to the second half. Simple but effective ball carrying took play into the Gloucester half, the backs were caught offside and Burns added the penalty, off the right hand upright, for a 12-9 lead.

And two minutes later, Burns made it 15-9 as, on this occasion, he put the penalty over off the left-hand post. Luck was on the former Gloucester fly half's side, it seemed.

Hook responded with his fourth penalty of the evening to get Gloucester back to 15-12 on 50 minutes, but still a try remained elusive.

The Tigers tried to turn the screw and, to be fair, had most of the possession as the hour mark came and went.

The majority of the decisions also continued to go their way, but Gloucester dug in and levelled the scores with a Hook penalty on 65 minutes.

Gloucester were then dealt a hammer blow as Charlie Sharples was sinbinned for reasons only referee JP Doyle could fathom. Burns rubbed salt into the wound with his sixth penalty to nudge Leicester into an 18-15 lead.

Hook tried valiantly to level matters with a penalty attempt from several metres inside his own half, but his effort was always going to fall short.

It was as close as Gloucester got. On the night, defeat was a bitter pill to swallow but Gloucester could take real solace from having pushed the Tigers so hard.

JC