

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2015

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

JOB DONE BUT INJURIES TAKE GLOSS OFF LONDON WELSH WIN

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 48 LONDON WELSH 10

Normally a win with a try scoring bonus point is something to celebrate, but it was a strangely subdued Kingsholm, on and off the pitch, in Gloucester's 48-10 victory over London Welsh on Saturday.

The score-line looks comfortable enough, but Gloucester had to overcome several obstacles on their way to victory, not least an opponent who resolutely refused to throw in the towel, despite trailing throughout, and a couple of injuries to key players.

Throw in some bizarre weather conditions, which made it a real battle in the mud for long periods, and it was a testing day at the office for the Cherry and Whites who had to dig deep to emerge with the win.

For all that, it's five points in the bag, and Gloucester leapfrog Harlequins in the Aviva Premiership table.

Credit to the visitors, London Welsh, they fought hard when it would have been easy to capitulate after conceding three tries in the opening half hour. However, they dug in and kept battling right to the very last minute. It's been a tough season for them but they played with real spirit.

Gloucester started with real purpose about them, testing the Exiles' defence with some powerful ball carrying. Eventually a penalty came and James Hook had an easy job to open the scoring.

Unfortunately, Gloucester were stripped of possession from the restart and had to defend their line to keep Welsh at bay. They did so, but at the expense of a penalty and Will Robinson levelled the scores.

The Cherry and Whites were then dealt a blow, and it was a sight no-one wanted to see. A mere 9 minutes into his first start since September, Henry Trinder went down in a tackle and didn't get back up. Seeing him stretchered off was desperately sad.

Hook duly made it 6-3 with his second penalty of the afternoon, but it was a very subdued Kingsholm for a couple of minutes out of sympathy for the stricken centre.

Everyone needed a lift and it was provided by a scything break from Mark Atkinson. His brilliant offload found Henry Purdy who was halted just short. However, two phases later Ross Moriarty crashed over from close range. Hook converted for 13-3.

The second try was equally as eye-catching. The forwards softened the Welsh pack up front, before the backs were unleashed, Charlie Sharples coming in off his wing to slice through and score untouched. Hook added another easy conversion.

The weather conditions then turned in an instant. The game had started in sunshine, now the teams were dealing with wind and hail! It was grim out there and got even tougher for the visitors when Alan Awcock was sinbinned for a deliberate knock-on.

Gloucester pounced straightaway. The penalty went to the corner but, instead of the catch and drive, Matt Kvesic peeled off at pace and crashed over. Hook again converted as a long day at the office beckoned for Welsh.

The fourth almost followed immediately as Billy Burns was freed down the left-hand touchline, but his floated inside pass to Bill Meakes drifted forward with a try beckoning.

As the half neared its conclusion, the Exiles started to get some joy with their catch and drive. Dean Schofield looked set to score as Piri Weepu smartly offloaded near the line but lost control as he tried to ground the ball.

It was a moment that perhaps typified the fortunes of the visitors this season. Gloucester won a turnover from the next phase of play and cleared to go into half time with a 27-3 lead.

It hadn't been perfect from Gloucester thus far, but good enough. However, the main talking point was the injury to Henry Trinder; incredibly bad luck for him.

And Gloucester seemed to be hit by a second injury setback at half time as Charlie Sharples failed to emerge for the second half, Dan Robson taking over on the right wing.

It was a subdued opening few minutes of the second half, the one shining light being a break from James Hook which very nearly took him through.

So it came as no real surprise when the visitors struck on 48 minutes. There was a hint of a forward pass in the build-up, but clever offloading kept the ball alive and skipper Carl Kirwan powered over under the posts. Will Robinson had an easy conversion.

Of greater concern possibly, however, was the sight of Matt Kvesic leaving the field injured; such has been his form this season. But, to their credit, Gloucester regrouped and promptly secured the try scoring bonus point. James Hook was the architect, floating a cross kick for Henry Purdy to brilliantly gather, get to his feet and score. Hook's conversion made it 34-10.

In muddy conditions, the game descended into a succession of errors from both sides, Gloucester of course by now featuring a much re-shuffled back line in particular. Tempers also started to fray as time ticked by.

However, Gloucester finished on a high with two tries, the first an absolute cracker from Henry Purdy.

The winger leapt high to keep a Welsh clearance from going into touch, tapping the ball inside to Callum Braley. The scrum-half beat a man, then put Purdy into space down the left. There was still a lot to do but Purdy shrugged off a challenge to score a great try in the corner. Hook converted again.

And, as time ticked away, so did the final vestiges of Welsh's resistance. They started to concede more and more penalties and, eventually, Sila Puafisi gleefully dived over from close range. Hook maintained his perfect kicking record with the final kick of the match to draw a line under proceedings.

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