

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SUNDAY, MARCH 1, 2015

RICOH ARENA – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**GLOUCESTER LEFT TO RUE MISSED OPPORTUNITIES IN DEFEAT
AT WASPS**

WASPS 32 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 21

Gloucester dominated for long periods against Wasps at the Ricoh Stadium on Sunday afternoon but were made to pay the price for defensive lapses and a number of key refereeing decisions not going their way in a 32-21 defeat.

It all added up to a deeply frustrating afternoon for the Cherry and Whites who did do many good things on the day. They left so many try-scoring chances out on the pitch – catch and drives that were repelled, James Hook almost scoring a superb solo score, a disallowed score for Mark Atkinson and a call for a possible penalty try turned down.

Contrast that with the way that Wasps gleefully exploited the briefest of Gloucester defensive lapses and you have the difference between the two teams.

Director of Rugby David Humphreys described it as the most disappointed that his team have been after a game. It was certainly a missed opportunity.

The challenge now is for Gloucester to regroup and focus on the small percentages which, if [they] can improve slightly, will make a real difference.

Gloucester started brightly and had an early penalty chance when Wasps handled illegally in the ruck, but James Hook's kick shaded the wrong side of the left hand upright. However, the fly half made no mistake on nine minutes to open the scoring after a similar offence.

Wasps had shown little in the early stages but turnover ball gave them great counter attack ball and only sterling defence from Kvesic and Palmer saved the day, as Nathan Hughes was tackled into touch as he marauded down the touchline.

The game needed a spark after some nondescript action, and it came on 18 minutes from Mark Atkinson. The centre jinked through a gap before offloading superbly to Ross Moriarty who ran over Christian Wade to score. Hook converted for 0-10.

It had been a great start, but Wasps came straight back. Gloucester seemed to be coping in defence, but James Gaskell spotted a gap in the fringe marking on the Gloucester 22, got over the gain line and found Thomas Young who stepped the last man and went over under the posts. Goode had an easy conversion for 7-10.

It was a blow for Gloucester but Dan Robson then carved open Wasps with a scything break. His grubber was then nearly touched down by Henry Purdy as Christian Wade dithered. However, play came back and Hook's second penalty made it 7-13.

The gap was short-lived as Wasps took advantage of a loose kick as the Gloucester chasers looked to be blocked. The unlikely figure of Cooper-Woolley threw a dummy, found Varndell who was hauled down by May, but offloaded to Rob Miller to score.

As half time approached, the Cherry and Whites were then well and truly caught napping by a quickly taken penalty. It was kicked quickly by Goode to the opposite wing where Christian Wade gathered and passed inside to Elliot Daly to score.

So, half time came with the home side edging it by 17 points to 13, but Gloucester would have been wondering how on earth they were behind. They had dominated proceedings, only to be caught by three scores in 12 minutes which seemingly came from nothing.

It was eerily reminiscent of the first meeting between the two sides at Kingsholm, when Wasps made barely any territory throughout the game but still scored the key tries.

Gloucester needed to hit back as the rain started to teem down in Coventry. They had shown that they had the game to do it, but they needed to sharpen up in defence to have a chance.

However, poor defence immediately let Gloucester down again. Having almost held up Nathan Hughes in a maul, Ashley Johnson was then missed around the fringes and had Thomas Young on his shoulder for the bonus point try. It was the worst possible start as the home team clinched the bonus point try, having run in 17 unanswered points.

James Hook very nearly scored a sensational solo effort to get Gloucester back into it but, chasing his own grubber ahead after a neat break, the ball bounced cruelly away from him and he had to settle for his third penalty to narrow the gap to 24-16.

Jonny May then almost inspired a superb counter attack try from deep before controversy reigned. James Downey knocked down a scoring pass and was yellow carded but no penalty try was forthcoming despite the evidence looking damning.

Moments later, a beautifully worked move saw Mark Atkinson dive over under the posts only for referee Barnes to disallow it for a dubious looking crossing call. It was the latest in a series of crucial decisions to go against the Cherry and Whites.

Since the second Young try, it had been all Gloucester. They had come so close on a number of occasions but had been denied for a variety of reasons.

Finally, though, the try came. Hook was pulling the strings at fly half and orchestrated a wrap-around move which saw Meakes put Purdy in at the corner. Again, it went to the TMO, but Gloucester got the benefit of a call at last.

Hook's conversion was wide of the posts, but it was game on with a full quarter of the game left to play.

However, it seemed as though Gloucester had perhaps emptied the tank trying to close the gap. Wasps slowly regained the ascendancy and Goode made it a six point game with a 70th minute penalty.

When Guy Thompson barged over from close range for Wasps fifth try, a tired looking Gloucester outfit started to slip off a few tackles and the home side took full advantage.

To their credit, the Cherry and Whites refused to throw in the towel and kept hammering away at the Wasps line in the final couple of minutes in a bid to secure a losing bonus point.

However, it wasn't to be. An overthrown lineout spoiled one great position and the game ended in the Wasps in-goal area as Gloucester tried a delicate chip behind the defensive line only for Sailosi Tagicakibau to win the chase.

JC