

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, APRIL 11, 2015

**TWICKENHAM STOOP – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY
GLOUCESTER CRUELLY AND CONTROVERSIALLY DENIED
AT THE STOOP**

HARLEQUINS 29 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 26

Gloucester will wonder how on earth they left the Stoop empty handed on Saturday afternoon, as two late yellow cards led to two Harlequins tries and a 29-26 win for the home team who had trailed for long periods.

It was an incredibly frustrating day at the office for Gloucester. They were dominant in so many areas of the game, led at half and until ten minutes from the final whistle.

However, in that final ten minutes Gloucester had two men yellow carded and leaked two tries. A 21-17 lead rapidly became a 21-29 deficit. Credit to the Cherry and Whites, they kept going right until the very end and secured a losing bonus point through a late Dan Robson try. But it was scant consolation.

In hindsight, Gloucester paid the price for not making the most of the periods of the game when Quins were reduced to 14 men – they were also the recipients of two yellow cards. The key difference was that Gloucester's sin-binnings were both at the same time and the 13 remaining men were understandably outgunned.

Defeat is always a bitter pill to swallow and this one will sting. But Gloucester need to focus on the many positives from their display today as they look ahead to next weekend's European Rugby Challenge Cup semi-final at home to Exeter.

The set piece was excellent today, particularly the scrum. Defensively also, Gloucester didn't look to be over-stressed. The first try was frustrating, coming from a quick tap. The final two were scored when Gloucester were short in numbers.

For their part, Gloucester scored some good tries as there were real signs of the backs rediscovering their cutting edge. But, in the final reckoning, it's the ill-discipline that cost Gloucester today's game and, with the likes of Slade and Steenson in the Exeter ranks next week, that will have to improve.

In glorious conditions at the Stoop, Gloucester's pack got off to a morale boosting start with a phenomenal first scrum. The Quins eight was splintered and conceded an obvious penalty, but the difficult kick for Laidlaw faded just wide of the left hand upright.

The home scrum continued to struggle but, totally against the run of play, they took the lead on 11 minutes. A quick tap caught Gloucester napping, Tikoïrotuma took the ball on and put Walker over in the corner and a 5-0 lead.

It was a kick in the teeth for the Cherry and Whites who had dominated matters up to that point, but switching off mentally for a split-second cost them dear.

However, the Gloucester pack were quickly back on the offensive, forcing another penalty at scrum time, and Laidlaw reduced the gap to 5-3, only for Evans to respond in kind after a quickly taken lineout.

Quins were obviously looking to play at real pace and try and run Gloucester ragged, but it was the boot of Laidlaw that struck next as his second penalty of the afternoon narrowed the gap to 8-6.

The home team were trying all sorts to try and break down the Gloucester defence – quick taps, quick lineouts, chips over the top of and through the defence – but it was a driving maul that led to another penalty and Evans made it 11-6.

Gloucester then clicked in the backs for the first time. Another good scrum platform set it up, James Hook glided through a gap and offloaded for Bill Meakes to battle his way to the line and his first Premiership try. Laidlaw converted to give Gloucester a 13-11 lead.

It led to a good spell from Gloucester. The Quins scrum buckled once more and Joe Marler was yellow carded. The Cherry and Whites looked to take immediate advantage, Gareth Evans coming close but the home team just held out.

That was it for the first half action and Gloucester went into the break holding a narrow, but well deserved 13-11 lead. It had been based on a dominant scrum and the lead really could have been greater.

Quins had looked dangerous, and Gloucester would be frustrated with the try they conceded from virtually nothing, but there were plenty of promising signs. More of the same would be required in the second half to finish the job off.

Gloucester came out strongly and had chances to increase the lead. Jonny May and Steve McColl broke down the right and almost put Charlie Sharples in. However, the winger couldn't hold on to the inside pass.

The winger made no mistake a few minutes later though, concerted pressure from the pack providing more good ball and Meakes long pass put the winger over in the corner for an 18-11 lead.

Evans immediately nibbled away at the lead with his third penalty as Quins sought to get back into the game.

Following the half time replacement of John Afoa, Gloucester sent Mariano Galarza and Dan Murphy into the fray.

Despite the reinforcements though, it was the unerring boot of Evans that made it a one point game on 57 minutes as his fourth penalty narrowed the Gloucester lead to 18-17.

The Stoop then erupted as Charlie Sharples kicked ahead and was taken late and high by Jack Clifford. The Quins number eight was yellow carded and, amidst some very unsporting booing from the home crowd, Greig Laidlaw kept his cool to kick the penalty for 21-17.

The game then swung decisively the way of the home team. They pinned Gloucester back into their own 22 and referee Luke Pearce yellow carded Ross Moriarty and Charlie Sharples within the space of a minute.

Quins kicked to the corner, set the catch and drive and, with all the backs joining in, Marland Yarde claimed the try and Quins had a 22-21 lead with just eight minutes left to play.

The home side then rubbed salt into the wound as they kept the ball alive well, offloading nicely out of the tackle and Gloucester simply ran out of numbers in defence, Ollie Lindsay-Hague crossing for Quins' third.

Nick Evans' conversion looked to have denied Gloucester even a losing bonus point until Robson's later intervention and, although the Cherry and Whites attacked bravely from deep to try and claw back the win, it wasn't to be.

JC