

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2015**

**SANDY PARK – WEST COUNTRY CHALLENGE CUP**

**GLOUCESTER DEFEATED BUT NOT DISGRACED IN WEST COUNTRY  
CHALLENGE CUP OPENER**

**EXETER CHIEFS 41 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 38**

**Match Report By Duncan Wood**

A young Gloucester side fought manfully at Sandy Park on Saturday afternoon, against two strong Exeter line-ups, but eventually went down to a narrow 41-38 defeat in the inaugural West Country Challenge Cup fixture.

It was always going to be a tough ask for a youthful looking Gloucester side, missing all their international stars, against a near full-strength Exeter outfit.

And backs were certainly against the wall in the first half when, playing with a strong wind at their backs, Exeter flexed their collective muscle up front, utilising the catch and drive to good effect with Thomas Waldrom claiming two tries from that very tactic.

However, despite trailing throughout and having lost skipper and playmaker Billy Burns early on, heads never dropped. In fact, a spirited late comeback took advantage of a Chiefs side that had perhaps switched off mentally, and the final score-line was closer than anyone had thought possible after the early stages.

The younger members of the Gloucester squad will certainly learn a huge amount from this. They fronted up, away from home, against a quality opposition and didn't let themselves down.

There is obviously still plenty to work on for the Cherry and Whites; it's the first full match of preseason at the end of the day. However, you can't coach team spirit and guts and the Cherry and Whites had it in spades today.

Gloucester had an early reprieve when Gareth Steenson was off target with an early penalty, but the relief was short-lived. A kick to the corner set up a catch and drive and Thomas Waldrom claimed the try. Steenson converted with ease.

The home side had the wind at their backs in the first half and were making good use of it. Gloucester were struggling to clear their lines, and the incessant pressure paid off on 19 minutes.

Olly Woodburn took a good high ball to set up an attacking position. The Chiefs had numbers on the left and James Short was able to go around Mat Protheroe and score. Steenson added his second conversion for a 14-0 lead.

It had been a tough opening quarter, but Gloucester finally started to string some phases together and scored a fine try. Atkinson produced a nice offload, Braley took the ball on before Bill Meakes found Steve McColl with an intelligent inside pass for the score.

It gave Gloucester a boost of confidence, but the Chiefs struck back almost immediately when they went back to the catch and drive and Thomas Waldrom touched down again. Steenson converted for 21-5.

The home team's efficiency in the red zone was in stark contrast with Gloucester's efforts. Twice the Cherry and Whites had 5-metre lineouts, only to see the ball stolen by the Chiefs defence.

The one thing that couldn't be faulted though was the side's effort and endeavour. It had been hard work in the Devon sunshine, but the young team could hold their heads up high.

Predictably, Gloucester made some changes at half time, but nothing compared to the Chiefs who fielded an entirely new starting XV !

However, Gloucester began the better as Mark Atkinson picked off an errant pass on halfway, broke a tackle and ran it back for a try under the posts. McColl converted but Will Hooley slotted a penalty for the hosts and a 24-12 lead.

Gloucester badly needed the next score but, unfortunately, it went the way of the home team.

Once again, the catch and drive did the damage but it was former Gloucester scrum-half Dave Lewis who darted over from close range. Hooley converted.

Once again, the Cherry and Whites dug deep and it came as no real surprise when, after some patient build up work, Jacob Rowan touched down for his side's third try.

Hooley kicked his second penalty to keep the Chiefs more than two scores clear before Max Bodilly took advantage of some careless Gloucester handling deep in their own half to touch down.

Hooley's conversion opened up a 41-19 gap and this one looked done and dusted.

However, Gloucester weren't quite done. Elliot Creed scampered over after the forwards had made the hard yards and then Rowan went over for his second.

They may have been consolation scores but Gloucester had their tails up and, as time expired, Henry Purdy broke down the left, kicked ahead and won the chase to touch down.

Steve McColl maintained his good goal-kicking form with the conversion from the touchline but Gloucester came up just short.

## Exeter Chiefs Line-ups

P Dollman (B McGuigan h/t); O Woodburn (I Whitten h/t), P Laverick (M Bodilly h/t), S Hill (A Hughes h/t), J Short (M Jess h/t); G Steenson (capt.), (W Hooley h/t), H Thomas (D Lewis h/t); A Hepburn (B Sturgess h/t), S Malton (L Cowan-Dickie h/t), M Low (H Williams h/t); M Lees (O Atkins h/t, J Hill 76), D Armand (D Welch h/t); D Ewers (T Johnson h/t), J Salvi (B White h/t), T Waldrom (S Skinner h/t).

## Gloucester Rugby Lineups

Mat Protheroe; Steve McColl, Olly Thorley, Mark Atkinson, Steph Reynolds; Billy Burns (capt), Ben Vellacott; Dan Murphy, Tom Lindsay, Nicky Thomas, Tom Hicks, Elliott Stooke, Lewis Ludlow, Dan Thomas, Gareth Evans

## Replacements:

Luke Cole, Paddy McAllister, Josh McNulty, James Hudson, Jacob Rowan, Callum Braley, Bill Meakes, Henry Purdy, Alex Craig, Will Safe, Elliot Creed, Jack Evans

JC