

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2015**

**MEMORIAL STADIUM – WEST COUNTRY CHALLENGE CUP**

**LATE HOOLEY PENALTY GIVES CHIEFS NARROW 33-31 WIN OVER  
BRAVE GLOUCESTER**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 31 EXETER CHIEFS 33**

**Match Report By Duncan Wood**

A late penalty from Exeter fly-half Will Hooley gave the Chiefs a narrow 33-31 West Country Challenge Cup win over a heroic Gloucester outfit in a bruising encounter at the Memorial Stadium on Saturday.

Gloucester outscored the visitors by four tries to three and had to overcome the loss of a number of players due to injury, but the pragmatic approach of the Chiefs won the day.

It was certainly a physical encounter between two sides who always seem to produce a close, hard-fought game.

And Gloucester could certainly reflect upon some bad luck in that department with several players limping off injured.

It forced Gloucester into a rapid reshuffle up front as all the injuries occurred amongst the pack. Credit to the Cherry and Whites, they refused to roll over and actually went on to dominate many facets of the match.

Indeed, had they opted to kick their goals instead of kicking to the corner, the outcome may have been very different. Exeter, in contrast, had no hesitation in kicking penalties when they were on offer in the second half.

In the circumstances, it was quite some comeback from Gloucester and they looked set to nick it when Billy Twelvetrees eventually decided to take a shot at the posts and kicked a 79th minute penalty to nudge his side into a 31-30 lead.

However, the Cherry and Whites were eventually undone by their own ambition, trying to run the ball from deep, turning it over and conceding a penalty which Hooley kicked to ultimately decide the game.

Even then, there was one brave last counter attack. A superb floated pass gave Steve McColl some running room and he marauded into the Chiefs 22. However, his inside pass to Bill Meakes arrived at the same time as an Exeter tackler and the ball ran loose.

Defeat is always frustrating and, allied with the injuries, today represents a frustrating day at the office.

But there were plenty of positives for Gloucester today, not least the fact that they scored four tries against a very stubborn defence.

Gloucester came into the game knowing that they needed a win to keep alive any hopes of winning the inaugural West Country Challenge Cup.

The Chiefs had won both their games to date and had nine points from two games to Gloucester's seven from three. A win for the Chiefs would effectively clinch the title.

Gloucester showed early ambition by kicking for the corner when presented with a kickable penalty, and then opted for a scrum when given a second chance in the shadow of the Exeter posts.

However, the Cherry and Whites then suffered a setback as hooker Darren Dawidiuk hobbled off injured to be replaced by Tom Lindsay, and a massive push by the Chiefs forced a penalty to end the immediate danger.

In the first meeting between the sides at Sandy Park, the Chiefs rolling maul was a potent weapon and it opened the scoring again today. The catch and drive was well set and Thomas Waldrom, predictably, was awarded the score. Steenson converted for 0-7.

More ill-discipline then gave the visitors more good territory and they took full advantage. An inside pass to Olly Woodburn gave the winger a chance to break the defensive line and, after some patient work by the pack, Luke Cowan-Dickie burrowed over. Steenson converted once again.

Gloucester almost hit straight back, Bill Meakes almost jinking his way to the line, but the Exeter defence was robust a few yards out and kept Gloucester at bay despite some powerful ball carrying.

The Chiefs were living dangerously, however, giving away numerous penalties and it came as no real surprise when Julian Salvi was sinbinned on 27 minutes. Gloucester stuck to their guns, went to the corner and Matt Kvesic touched down. Billy Twelvetrees added an excellent conversion from the touchline.

However, the real concern at this point was the number of injuries Gloucester were picking up. In addition to Dawidiuk, Jacob Rowan, John Afoa and Gareth Evans all had to leave the field. Dan Thomas replaced Evans but only lasted three minutes before being replaced himself by Tom Hicks. Thankfully, Afoa returned.

Gloucester's pack by now bore no resemblance to the one that started the game, and conceded a penalty at a set scrum which Steenson slotted with aplomb.

The backs were still intact though. Atkinson claimed the restart, the ball was set up in midfield, Twelvetrees showed some neat sleight of hand, Meakes showed his twinkling toes and found Henry Purdy who dived over. Twelvetrees converted excellently again for 14-17.

The unerring boot of Steenson slotted his second penalty as Gloucester unluckily conceded for playing the ball in an offside position after the restart but there was still time for Gloucester to snatch the lead before half time.

Billy Twelvetrees opted to kick for the corner, a popular decision with the home support, but the catch and drive was thwarted. However, the ball was swiftly spun into midfield where Mark Atkinson broke a tackle and used every inch of his frame to reach and make the line. The skipper converted for a 21-20 half time lead.

It had been quite some turnaround after a rough opening few minutes. Gloucester had taken their time in finding the combination to unlock the Exeter defence, but had remained patient and finally got their reward.

The injuries were a concern at this stage, but the team had to focus on the next 40 minutes as an Exeter fightback was bound to come.

Gloucester started the second half strongly and, once again, spurned a kickable penalty in favour of a scrum but weren't rewarded for their endeavour as Lewis Ludlow was caught in possession at the base.

And the Chiefs made them pay on 51 minutes, Gareth Steenson's sharp break taking play into the Gloucester 22. Olly Woodburn took it on but it was Don Armand who touched down from close range with Steenson converting for 21-27.

Gloucester did their best to hit straight back, Willi Heinz producing one great break but the breakthrough remained elusive despite some promising moves and real pressure deep in the Exeter 22.

Something had to give, and eventually it did. Twelvetrees and Meakes produced a slick loop in the midfield and combined to put Steve McColl in for Gloucester's fourth try. Twelvetrees converted and Gloucester were back in front.

Frustratingly, Hooley immediately kicked the Chiefs back into the lead with his first penalty of the afternoon.

Twelvetrees duly replied in kind and Gloucester looked set for the win, only for Hooley to have the last word.

#### Gloucester Rugby Lineups

Rob Cook; Charlie Sharples, Bill Meakes, Mark Atkinson, Henry Purdy; Billy Twelvetrees (capt), Willi Heinz; Paddy McAllister, Darren Dawidiuk, John Afoa; Tom Savage, Elliott Stooke; Jacob Rowan, Matt Kvesic, Gareth Evans

#### Replacements:

Tom Lindsay, Yann Thomas, Paul Doran-Jones, Tom Hicks, Dan Thomas, Callum Braley, Steve McColl, Olly Thorley, Nicky Thomas, Alex Craig, Lewis Ludlow, Mat Protheroe

#### Exeter Chiefs Lineups

Phil Dollman; Olly Woodburn, Ian Whitten, Sam Hill, James Short; Gareth Steenson (capt), Will Chudley; Ben Moon, Luke Cowan-Dickie, Moray Low; Mitch Lees, Damian Welch; Don Armand, Julian Salvi, Thomas Waldrom

#### Replacements:

Jack Yeandle, Alec Hepburn, Alex Brown, Ollie Atkins, Tom Johnson, Dave Lewis, Will Hooley, Matt Jess, Shaun Malton, Harry Williams, Jonny Hill, Ben White, Kai Horstmann, Haydn Thomas, Max Bodilly, Byron McGuigan