

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2015

KINGSTON PARK – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**GLOUCESTER HOLD THEIR NERVE TO CLINCH OPENING NIGHT WIN
AT NEWCASTLE**

NEWCASTLE FALCONS 27 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 39

For the first time since 2009, Gloucester open the Aviva Premiership season with a win, nine penalties from Billy Twelvetrees paving the way for a 39-27 win over the Falcons at Kingston Park.

What a difference twelve months makes! Last season, Gloucester kicked off their Aviva Premiership season with a 50 point setback at Northampton. This evening they kicked things off with an away win.

It wasn't easy. The first half was exceptional, but the second saw Newcastle creep back into things and really ask some questions of this Gloucester side. Perhaps in the past, they might have caved in. However, tonight they had the mental strength to hold on.

For it to be such a contest towards the end really was a surprise after the first 40 minutes when Gloucester simply blew Newcastle away. The set piece and defence were rock solid, the tries were well taken.

And there seemed little to worry about at the start of the second half when the lead was actually extended.

However, a couple of defensive lapses allowed the host to score from range and it was suddenly game on.

Billy Twelvetrees was a calming presence though, and certainly had his kicking boots with him as he racked up a personal haul of 29 points. It's been quite some week for him.

It's a decent start for the Cherry and Whites but still plenty to work on. The coaches will know that things will have to be stepped up a notch before the visit of Saracens next Friday but, for now, the team will reflect upon a job well done in the North East at a venue which has proved to be tough to crack in the past.

It was a solid opening few minutes for Gloucester who found themselves under early pressure. However, a series of Newcastle misdemeanours led to an early penalty chance for Billy Twelvetrees and the skipper made no mistake.

The dose was repeated three minutes later as the Falcons conceded yet another penalty and Twelvetrees made it 6-0 after ten minutes. Murmurs of discontent were heard around the ground.

However, the jeers quickly turned to cheers as Matt Kvesic was deemed not to have supported his own weight as he competed at a ruck, and Mike Delany's kick just had the legs to open the Falcons' account.

Twelvetrees promptly restored the six point advantage as the Newcastle scrum buckled on their own put in and Gloucester's fly half landed the kick from just a couple of metres inside the home half and followed that up with his fourth successful penalty on 21 minutes.

Twelvetrees was just short with his fifth attempt of the night but better was to come for Gloucester. John Afoa made a superb break into the 22, Gloucester stayed patient as Willi Heinz went blindside and put Matt Kvesic over in the corner. The tempo was superb from the Cherry and Whites and the 17-3 lead well deserved.

Even better was to come. Lineout ball off the top saw Mark Atkinson truck it up in midfield. Quick recycling saw Bill Meakes make an incisive break and his pass put Charlie Sharples clear and over. Twelvetrees added the extras for 24-3.

It provoked a serious response from the home side, inspired by the ball carrying of Ally Hogg who were desperate for a score before half time.

They thought they had one when they nicked a Gloucester lineout but referee Foley spotted a knock on.

The Gloucester defence bent a little but, crucially, didn't break and kept their line intact. And, on the stroke of half time, extended the lead through Twelvetrees' fifth penalty as a big hit from Jacob Rowan forced Newcastle to field the ball in an offside position.

It had been an impressive first 40 minutes for the Cherry and Whites. The set piece was solid, the defence robust and the backs looked sharp with ball in hand. Could they close this one out for a dream opening day result?

Twelvetrees quickly extended the lead. He was short with a long-range penalty but Simon Hammersley knocked on. Newcastle subbed the entire front row but still conceded a penalty and Twelvetrees added an easy three points.

However, the home team suddenly pounced. Gloucester's defence looked well set, but Simon Hammersley came back on the angle to scythe through and score. Delany converted and there was life in the home team.

Delany then opened up Gloucester with a neat chip and catch and Willi Heinz saved the day with a fine tackle on the rampaging Hogg. However, Delany narrowed the gap with a penalty.

The Cherry and Whites then could have finished it as Charlie Sharples opened up the home side with a blistering run, but Henry Purdy was held up over the line as he tried to fight his way to the line.

The Newcastle scrum buckled once again, and Twelvetrees pragmatically decided to go for the posts and his sixth penalty made it 13-33.

The home side weren't done just yet though, and Delany pulled the strings for the Falcons to immediately score a cracker.

The fly-half's flat pass put Chris Harris through and the centre had the pace to go under the posts. Delany's conversion narrowed the gap to 20-33.

Twelvetrees settled the nerves with his seventh penalty to extend the lead once again, but a nervy final 15 minutes lay ahead with Newcastle throwing caution to the wind.

And the alarm bells rang even louder with eight minutes to go as George McGuigan forced his way over from close range, Delany's conversion narrowing the gap to 27-36, but Twelvetrees again stepped up and slotted his eighth penalty to calm things down.

With their poise re-gathered, Gloucester played the rest of the game in Newcastle territory and refused to allow the Falcons a glimmer of a hope. Four points in the bag and the Cherry and Whites are off and running.

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