

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2015

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**AGONY FOR GLOUCESTER AS SARACENS EDGE NAIL-BITER
AT KINGSHOLM**

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 15 SARACENS 17

This one went to the wire last season, and did so again on Friday evening, a late Owen Farrell penalty earning Saracens a narrow 15-17 Aviva Premiership win at Kingsholm.

It's a game of fine margins at the highest level and so it proved this evening. There was very little to choose between the two teams on the night but Saracens were just streetwise enough to edge a close one.

They also took full advantage of what was pretty much their only real scoring opportunity, whereas Gloucester can rightly consider that they left a couple of scores out there.

In the final reckoning, it came down to a duel between the goal-kickers and, as time ticked by, you got the distinct impression that the last successful kick would win the day.

And, so it proved to be. Owen Farrell kept his nerve to derail Gloucester's comeback bid only seconds after Billy Twelvetrees had seemed to give the Cherry and Whites another famous win.

It wasn't to be, however, but it does show how much progress Gloucester have made in 12 months, that they were so disappointed to lose a close win to such an accomplished opponent.

There's precious little time to dwell on it though. Next Saturday sees local rivals Worcester Warriors come to town, and both teams will be itching to get their second win of the season.

The first chance of points on the evening went the way of Gloucester as a high tackle gave Billy Twelvetrees a tricky penalty chance. However, the skipper didn't get hold of his effort and it fell short and wide.

It was physical stuff in the early stages, with both sides feeling each other out. And the first victim injury-wise was Saracens scrum-half, Neil De Kock, who was replaced by Richard Wigglesworth. He was followed off by Michael Rhodes as the battle for supremacy continued.

Despite these setbacks, the first score went the way of the visitors. Awarded a lineout when Gloucester weren't actually in touch, they took full advantage to score the only try of the game.

After a penalty award, Nick Tompkins made a good break, Farrell was on hand to keep the ball alive and, eventually, Mike Ellery was put over in the corner. Hodgson was off target with the conversion.

A missed tackle sprung Tompkins on that occasion, and he duly broke another on 20 metres to inspire a break from deep. Saracens forced a five metre scrum, then a penalty and Hodgson made no mistake for 0-8.

The Cherry and Whites almost hit straight back as Meakes gathered the restart as Saracens failed to gather. A penalty award saw Gloucester go to the corner, but referee Carley failed to award the try as Gloucester went over, giving the visitors the scrum.

The Gloucester pack duly dug deep and forced a penalty on the Saracens put in, and Billy Twelvetrees opened the Gloucester account on 29 minutes. The skipper then narrowed the gap to 6-8 five minutes later as the visitors used hands in the ruck.

It wasn't particularly pretty stuff at this point. Lots of carrying from the forwards, lots of box-kicking from the scrum-halves. But Gloucester were fronting up well to the Saracens juggernaut, with Ben Morgan catching the eye with some great carries.

But the final word of the half went the way of the visitors, Gloucester penalised just inside their own half and Owen Farrell booting the long-range penalty.

The Cherry and Whites could consider themselves slightly unlucky to be trailing at half time. There was very little to choose between the two sides. The only try came from a lineout that shouldn't have been and Gloucester had had a try ruled out.

Saracens are nothing but resilient, however, and had taken what was on offer and kept their line intact. It had been an arm wrestle of a first half and a similar second half beckoned.

It was nearly a perfect start to the second period for Gloucester as Jonny May gathered a kick and then put James Hook through a gap. Hook kicked ahead for Sharples to chase but Mike Ellery got back to end the threat.

The visitors' defence then had to be at its very best as Ellery failed to deal with a high ball and Kvesic gathered to steam into the 22. Twelvetrees didn't spot an unmarked Jonny May outside him so Gloucester pounded away at the line, but simply couldn't get over the whitewash.

However, Saracens had defended their line illegally, referee Carley awarded the penalty and Twelvetrees' successful kick made it a 9-11 game. The tension was building nicely and Twelvetrees nudged his side into a 12-11 lead after 62 minutes with his third penalty.

Owen Farrell had an immediate chance to respond as Saracens produced their best scrum of the game, but dragged his kick across the posts and the Shed all but exploded with glee.

However, Farrell responded in the best possible way by slotting his next effort a few minutes later.

There was still plenty of drama to come. Rhys Gill seemed to drop two scrums before finally being penalised on the third occasion, and Twelvetrees booted a monster of a kick from halfway to give Gloucester real hope of a memorable victory.

That hope was rapidly snuffed out. From the restart, Will Fraser got into a position where he won the penalty on the deck with a trademark jackal and Farrell's kick sliced between the uprights like a dagger through Gloucester hearts.

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