

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2015**

**KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**WORCESTER GAME GOES TO THE WIRE –  
BUT GLOUCESTER EDGE IT**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 24 WORCESTER WARRIORS 22**

Games between Gloucester and Worcester are rarely straightforward, with the form book often thrown out of the window. So it proved again at Kingsholm on Saturday as Gloucester hung on to win a thriller by 24 points to 22.

The final outcome could have gone either way. Gloucester felt hard done by on two separate occasions not to have got the fourth try which would have clinched it, but then had to defend desperately to keep the Warriors at bay.

It took a forward pass by Worcester and then a penalty conceded by Dean Ryan's men to finally allow the Cherry and Whites to relax and reflect upon four points gained from a frenetic 80 minutes.

In truth, Gloucester should probably have put this game to bed far earlier than they did. They dominated territory and possession, spending large amounts of time in the Worcester 22 without coming away with anything.

They also gifted Cooper Vuna an interception try having just taken the lead and, overall, will focus on a lack of accuracy which allowed the Warriors to stay in the game.

But, with the benefit of hindsight, Gloucester have started with two wins from three and know that there is still so much to come from the squad.

The trip to Wasps next weekend will require them to be better and that will be the focus next week.

In perfect conditions, it was a perfect opening for Gloucester. A penalty award on halfway allowed James Hook to drill play deep into the Worcester 22. The catch and drive was patient and Richard Hibbard claimed the try and an early 5-0 lead.

However, the Cherry and Whites promptly handed the lead to the Warriors. Attacking from their own 22 from the restart, Bill Meakes didn't spot Cooper Vuna lurking, and the Worcester winger had an easy interception to score. Tom Heathcote converted.

Vuna was a constant threat throughout in this respect, happy to fly out of the defensive line and pick off anything errant. Thankfully, no more stuck!

Meakes almost made immediate amends with an intercept of his own. However, the cover got back and Tom Biggs knocked down his attempted pass to Jonny May. Worcester killed the ball at the ruck and seemed to escape as Gloucester's kick to the corner came up empty-handed.

However, the Gloucester pack destroyed the Worcester scrum, won a penalty and Billy Twelvetrees bisected the posts for an 8-7 lead.

Turnover ball then led to a superb Gloucester score. Play went right to Halaifonua who made good ground, before switching left where May and Kvesic combined to send Sione Kalamafoni galloping over. A lengthy TMO referral delayed matters but the try was given.

The Gloucester scrum then forced another penalty and Twelvetrees' penalty made it 16-7 but Ryan Mills, formerly of this parish, duly responded with a three pointer of his own to restore the six point gap.

Gloucester were then, bizarrely, penalised twice at scrum time and a cunning grubber from Chris Pennell pinned the Cherry and Whites back. The Warriors had the five metre lineout, and they unveiled a decent catch and drive for hooker Niall Annett to touch down. Heathcote's conversion nudged the visitors in front.

Another big scrum in front of the Worcester posts gave Twelvetrees another easy penalty, and he duly accepted it, but his next effort, from near halfway, hit the right hand upright and bounced clear to keep the score at 19-17.

That was it for the scoring for the first half, and the teams went in with the game finely poised. Gloucester had dominated in most areas but Worcester had hung in doggedly and taken the rare chances that came their way.

The Cherry and Whites were guilty really of a bit of inaccuracy which was keeping the Warriors in the game. The first Worcester try was an intercept and the second came from two rare scrum indiscretions.

Gloucester would have to eradicate these moments to close out the game, as the longer Worcester stayed in the hunt, the more their self-belief would grow.

The Cherry and Whites began the second half in fine form, stretching the Worcester defence without ever quite making the decisive break. Worcester hung in there and it remained a two point game.

And the visitors, having soaked up so much pressure, then hit Gloucester with a real sucker punch. Good lineout ball gave their backs the chance to attack the 13 channel, Chris Pennell made the decisive yards and a perfectly timed pass put Vuna away for his second.

Ryan Lamb crucially couldn't convert, but Worcester had struck a real blow with that score and it remained to be seen whether Gloucester could hit back.

However, the Cherry and Whites had by now introduced their own 'will o' the wisp' fly-half in the form of Billy Burns, and he soon started to dart around, testing the Worcester defence with a series of half breaks and slick passes.

Finally, a chink of light was found down the right flank as Burns worked a lovely run around move with Hook, then found Charlie Sharples and his offload gave Tongan international winger David Halaifonua room to run before powering through the final tackle to score.

With Gloucester now in the lead by 24 points to 22, it seemed inconceivable that no more points would be scored.

The Cherry and Whites went for the jugular and seemed to have wrapped things up when Jonny May picked a pass off his toes and went over in the left-hand corner. However, referee Maxwell-Keys ruled that the pass went forward and refused to consult the TMO despite Gloucester imploring him to do so.

It was a key moment, as was the series of scrums near the Worcester line just a few minutes from time. Four times a penalty was awarded and, after the final one, Nick Schonert was sinbinned.

However, no penalty try was awarded. Worcester had to go to uncontested scrums and promptly nicked the ensuing Gloucester lineout. Kingsholm was seething ...

And the unthinkable then very nearly happened. Gloucester knocked on, Worcester countered and very nearly nicked it. Thankfully, the Cherry and Whites held on and can put this one down to experience and move on.