

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2015**

FRANKLIN'S GARDENS – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

MYLER'S BOOT PUNISHES INDISCRETIONS AND THWARTS BRAVE  
GLOUCESTER EFFORTS AT SAINTS

NORTHAMPTON SAINTS 15 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 3

After a shaky opening quarter, Gloucester battled bravely at Franklin's Gardens against Northampton Saints and will feel that they deserved better than to finish on the wrong end of a 15-3 score-line.

It was a deeply frustrating evening for Gloucester on an evening when the conditions very much dictated proceedings. Heavy rain before the game made handling nigh-on impossible and the pitch heavy underfoot.

The Cherry and Whites fell behind early, struggling in the set-piece in the first quarter when they fell behind 9-0, courtesy of three penalties from Stephen Myler.

After that, it was very much an arm wrestle. Gloucester steadied the ship and coped much better with what Saints could throw at them. In fact, in the second half, they created arguably the two best scoring chances of the game.

However, it wasn't Gloucester's night and they couldn't add to the solitary penalty that Billy Twelvetrees kicked in the first half. Myler then added two more penalties in the final quarter to close out the game.

Gloucester will without doubt feel that they committed too many errors and gave away too many penalties against a side of Northampton's class. But they can take solace from their attitude and the way they battled in adversity.

The areas for improvement are clear and they will certainly be focused on during the week as they prepare for the visit of Sale Sharks to Kingsholm next Friday evening.

In the build up to kick off, the rain steadily fell at Franklin's Gardens, depressingly highlighted by the floodlights. It all pointed to a match where the ball wasn't going to get moved wide an awful lot...

And so it proved in the opening few minutes, as boot was constantly put to ball by both sides although the weather had eased slightly.

Handling errors were commonplace in these opening stages and it came as no surprise when the first chance of points came from the boot, Saints earning a penalty when a Gloucester scrum went down. Stephen Myler made no mistake for a 3-0 lead after 10 minutes.

Another scrum penalty allowed the home team to build the pressure again in the next few minutes. The defence was solid but John Afoa was penalised at a ruck in front of the posts and Myler had no difficulty making it 6-0.

Gloucester then very nearly hit the self-destruct button, as a pass from Twelvetrees was picked off by Luther Burrell, who hacked ahead. Sharples and Heinz got back to clear up but a big defensive effort was called for as Saints pressed.

Gloucester's woes at the scrum were continuing though, and another penalty conceded allowed Myler to make it 9-0 after 22 minutes. Yann Thomas subsequently replaced Paddy McAllister.

The Cherry and Whites duly got their first points of the evening in the moments that followed as Northampton dragged down a maul and Billy Twelvetrees knocked over an excellent penalty from long range.

It prompted Gloucester's best spell of the game and Northampton skipper Tom Wood was yellow carded for coming in at the side of a Gloucester maul. However, the chance to rub salt in the wounds escaped as Twelvetrees dragged the ensuing penalty wide.

Gloucester pushed hard in the final moments of the half, primarily using the driving maul, a sensible tactic in the worsening conditions. However, the home defence held and it was the Saints who went into half time with a 9-3 lead.

It had been a tough first half for the Cherry and Whites who had struggled to establish a platform to play from. They had come into the game more as half-time approached but the scoreboard was perhaps a touch flattering at half time.

However, they were still in the game. A massive effort would be required at half time and conditions weren't great. But the game was still in the balance.

It was attritional stuff at the start of the second half, neither team really able to get the upper hand and the first real event of note for Gloucester was the introduction of Mariano Galarza and Sione Kalamafoni on 51 minutes.

Gloucester then had their best chance of the game as Saints knocked on just a few metres out. Jonny May set off down the left wing and left Lee Dickson for dead but chose to chip ahead as Ben Foden came across and the chance was gone.

The Cherry and Whites had battled superbly throughout the first 25 minutes of the half and arguably should have had more points, but went further behind rather unjustly on 64 minutes.

Hanrahan and Tuala made good ground up the right, but Matt Kvesic was harshly penalised at the breakdown and Myler made it 12-3. When the Saints fly-half punished another Gloucester scrum penalty two minutes later, Gloucester were entitled to feel aggrieved.

Gloucester carried on pushing to battle their way back into the game and so nearly got a well-deserved try as Billy Twelvetrees slid a grubber kick through for Henry Purdy to chase. Purdy looked set to score but the ball hit the post and bounced clear.

It was that sort of night for Gloucester and it was to their credit that they dug in and kept their line intact in the final few minutes.

JC