

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2015**

**KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**SALE BATTLE TO BITTER END BUT GLOUCESTER DOG OUT  
VITAL WIN**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 23 SALE SHARKS 19**

A storming second-half display, highlighted by Sione Kalamafoni's two tries, saw Gloucester fight back to overturn a five point deficit and defeat Sale Sharks by 23 points to 19 on Friday evening.

It wasn't a classic, it wasn't a thing of beauty. However, Gloucester will leave Kingsholm this evening feeling very thankful to have secured the four Aviva Premiership points.

They were pushed all the way by a resolute Sale side, a team hewn in the image of their Director of Rugby – tough as teak and unwilling to take a backward step.

And when the Sharks took a five point lead in the second half, it looked as though this one might well slip away from the Cherry and Whites.

Bizarrely, though, it seemed to take a good old-fashioned dust up to get Gloucester going. Several former players would probably have looked on and approved!

After Jonny May was penalised for man-handling Peter Stringer as the veteran refused to give up the ball for a lineout, Gloucester were transformed. The bit was between their teeth and the 'dawg' was back.

Two Sione Kalamafoni tries saw Gloucester surge into the lead, but even then, it wasn't easy.

Sale came back hard and were still in the game right up until the very final whistle when a Ross Moriarty lineout steal sealed the win.

On the final whistle, Kingsholm exploded in a mixture of delight and relief. It's an important win for Gloucester ahead of the European double-header against Worcester.

A word though for the Gloucester pack. Rather harshly, they've taken a hammering in the media and online in the past seven days. Today they gave it everything, fronted up manfully against a dogged opponent and laid a decent platform. Collective pats on the back.

There was also a phenomenal defensive effort. Gloucester put in 147 tackles throughout the match but were only breached by a moment of genius from Danny Cipriani and when they were down to 14 men. Bodies were certainly put on the line.

In truth, both sides will probably feel that they weren't at their best. There were plenty of errors from both teams and Sale seemed to relish playing on the nerves of a seemingly tense Gloucester side.

And, in Danny Cipriani, they have a man who can change a game in an instant. Every time he touched the ball, there was a sense of menace.

That said, Gloucester got the perfect start as Sale misjudged the kick-off to give the Cherry and Whites great field position. They had struggled to convert these chances in recent weeks but stayed patient and got it right.

They probed around the fringes, both backs and forwards having a go until the overlap was created on the left and Rob Cook slid in for a 5-0 lead after only three minutes courtesy of some lovely quick hands by James Hook.

Sale hit back, testing the Gloucester defence with some good ball retention and offloading. The initial defence was good but the Cherry and Whites were finally unlocked by a moment of genius.

Faced with an onrushing defensive line, Danny Cipriani dinked a chip over the top for left wing Nev Edwards to catch and spring home. It was a moment of class but Cipriani couldn't back it up with the conversion so it was 5-5 after 12 minutes.

It was a good spell for Sale who moved immediately back into the Gloucester 22 following some home indiscipline. The visitors went to the corner again but were rebuffed, and had to settle for a penalty from Cipriani.

Gloucester needed to settle and were soon back on terms. Edwards allowed an up and under from May to bounce and, although Haley rescued the situation, Sale conceded a penalty and Billy Twelvetrees levelled the scores with ease.

The Gloucester skipper then nailed a long-range effort from just inside the Sale half to give his team an 11-8 lead as the recently maligned home pack won a penalty at scrum time.

Having worked so hard to work their way into the lead, Gloucester very nearly shot themselves in the foot by losing two lineouts and conceding a penalty. Having lost a ton of territory, the defence once again stepped up and saved the day.

Both teams enjoyed some promising moments as half time approached, but there were no further chances and no scores, so Gloucester went into the break with a slim 11-8 lead.

The game was still very much in the balance. The Cherry and Whites were doing some good things, but struggling to string enough phases together to breach the Sale defence.

The visitors were enjoying some dangerous moments themselves, and the half-back duo of Stringer and Cipriani were the real threat, the fly-half in particular looking as though he could conjure up a bit of magic at any moment.

Unfortunately, Sale were back on level terms within a minute, Gloucester penalised as they tried to run the kick-off clear and Cipriani having an easy penalty attempt.

Gloucester were then dealt a real blow as Richard Hibbard was yellow carded for bringing down a Sale maul. With superiority of numbers, Sale made it count. Haley made the key break but Edwards got the score in the corner.

It was a key phase for Gloucester and tempers were rising. When Stringer held onto the ball having carried it into touch, May bundled him over and a mass brawl broke out.

Perhaps it proved to be what Gloucester needed. They suddenly looked fired up, winning the physical battles. Trinder made a good break, but it was Rob Cook who found Sione Kalamafoni and the number eight smashed his way over to level things up yet again.

Greig Laidlaw couldn't convert but Gloucester were back. A powerful driving maul trundled its way downfield before the ball was released and Trinder's offload found Kalamafoni who plunged over. Laidlaw converted and Gloucester had a decent 23-16 lead.

Back came the Sharks, and Gloucester's defence had to be at its very best. Even then, they had conceded three points to a Cipriani penalty which saw the home crowd biting its fingernails going into the final few minutes.

Gloucester's defence had to be at its best and, with no time left, Sale had a lineout in the Gloucester half, but Ross Moriarty climbed majestically to snaffle possession. The threat was thwarted and the win was in the bag.