

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2015

SIXWAYS – EUROPEAN RUGBY CHALLENGE CUP

**PURDY'S BRACE PAVES THE WAY FOR IMPRESSIVE GLOUCESTER
WIN AT WORCESTER**

WORCESTER WARRIORS 22 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 34

Gloucester maintained their unbeaten run in this season's European Rugby Challenge Cup with a bonus point 34-22 victory over Worcester Warriors at Sixways on Thursday evening.

It's a win that sees Gloucester take an iron grip of the group, with three wins from three. The challenge now is to follow up and complete the job against the same opponent at Kingsholm next Thursday.

The win was sealed in the second half, the teams having turned around at 10 points apiece at half time. With Billy Burns pulling the strings in style, Gloucester assumed control and didn't let Worcester back into things despite some spirited resistance.

The Warriors were certainly no pushover. Indeed, they scored probably the try of the match in the first half through Dean Hammond and carried on battling throughout. They made a real nuisance of themselves for a good hour or so and there were moments of real frustration for the Cherry and Whites.

But, based on a strong scrummaging platform, Gloucester stayed patient, stuck to the game plan and just about had the edge throughout and did a professional job in the second half. Five points on the road in Europe is not to be sniffed at.

Purdy's tries will grab the headlines, and Billy Burns was named Sky Man of the Match. But it was a solid team performance with the likes of Lewis Ludlow tackling himself into a standstill in the back row.

Gloucester have set themselves up nicely now. If they can back up this victory with another one next week at Kingsholm, they will be in good shape in Europe.

Rain had fallen throughout the day, but as the game kicked off, the skies were clear but the pitch was greasy. All things told, conditions were pretty good.

The opening few minutes passes with nothing really of note happening. Both teams were understandably cautious as they got to grips with each other and the respective fly halves were content to put boot to ball frequently.

And, predictably, it was the boot that opened the scoring, Greig Laidlaw slotting a 10th minute penalty as Gloucester won a penalty at the game's opening scrum.

However, the home team hit back, and in some style. A wrap around move in midfield sucked in Henry Purdy and good hands gave Dean Hammond room to run. The winger had a lot to do but managed to ride Laidlaw's covering tackle and score. Lamb converted for 7-3.

Gloucester had an immediate chance to hit back as they forced Worcester to carry over their own line. But, despite forcing a couple of penalties, the home team held out and the chance was lost.

Henry Trinder then picked up a loose ball in midfield as a home move broke down. He pinned his ears back and set off for the line, but was tracked down by Ben Howard who pulled off a try saving tackle as Trinder's attempted offload went forward.

The frustration grew as Gloucester forced another penalty at the set scrum, Paul Doran-Jones doing a good job on his opposite number; however Laidlaw's long-range penalty fell short.

The Gloucester scrum certainly had the upper hand, and the next infringement at scrum time saw Worcester's Gareth Milasinovich sent to the sinbin.

The numerical advantage was swiftly capitalised upon. Worcester sacrificed Tom Biggs for a front row replacement, but it was on the other wing that the score came; Henry Purdy plucking Mark Atkinson's cross kick out of the air and battling his way to the line after Gloucester took one against the head. Laidlaw converted to edge Gloucester in front at 7-10.

There was still just time for the home team to get back on terms, and they duly did so. Marco Mama's break set up the position and, despite dogged Gloucester defence, Ryan Lamb dropped a goal to send the teams in on level terms at half time.

It hadn't been a classy affair, far from it, despite a seeming willingness from both teams to play some rugby. But both outfits were guilty of turnovers when well-placed and, in truth, even-stevens was a fair result at the interval.

Gloucester started the second half the better, Billy Burns testing the Worcester back three with some well-judged kicking. One scoring chance came and went, but the pressure told and Henry Purdy muscled his way over from close range after Burns found him with a neat inside pass.

There was a spring in the collective step now of the Cherry and Whites, and the third try wasn't far behind. Billy Burns fired out a lovely flat pass for Rob Cook to tiptoe down the line and score.

Up 10-22, Gloucester had some daylight, but back came the home side.

Some indiscipline allowed Worcester into the 22, Lewis Ludlow was yellow carded after a maul was pulled down, and replacement prop Mike Daniels touched down from the following catch and drive. Lamb converted off the upright for 17-22 after 65 minutes.

Matters were finely poised and it looked as though a nervy few minutes might lie in wait. But then Greig Laidlaw unleashed a moment of class as his show-and-go split the defence wide open and his scoring pass found Steve McColl who steamed home.

Gloucester then put the game well and truly to bed as Burns floated a cross kick to the corner. Billy Twelvetrees wanted it the most, plucked possession out of the air and touched down.

The Warriors to their credit did have the last word, touching down after some forward pressure but it was way too little too late and Gloucester headed down the M5 with the local bragging points – for now!

JC