

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2015**

**KINGSHOLM – EUROPEAN RUGBY CHALLENGE CUP**

**GLOUCESTER MAKE IT FOUR FROM FOUR WITH BATTLING  
EURO WIN OVER WORCESTER**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 27 WORCESTER WARRIORS 13**

It wasn't pretty at Kingsholm on Thursday evening, mainly thanks to some magnificent Worcester defence, but Gloucester wore down Worcester to emerge 27-13 winners and remain unbeaten in this season's European Rugby Challenge Cup.

The victory makes it thirteen wins in a row in the tournament, a competition record, and also sees Gloucester cement their position at the top of the pool which they now top by 12 clear points.

However, it was certainly a game for the purists as Gloucester, despite dominating possession and territory, struggled to break down a resolute Worcester defence while the visitors took the only real chance they created.

The stats will show that Gloucester spent long periods in the Worcester 22, only to frustratingly turn over possession when well placed near the line.

The Warriors were also combative at the breakdown, slowing up Gloucester ball while the home side dominated at scrum time without quite managing to turn that into points.

It all added up to an evening which tested the patience of all the players and supporters.

In the end, Gloucester were indebted to 22 points from scrum-half Greig Laidlaw, which included his first try for the club, and a second half try from Matt Kvesic while Worcester capitalised on a turnover to score their one try from deep.

However, a win is a win and Gloucester will head into Big Game 8 at Twickenham against Harlequins on December 27th on the back of three wins in a row.

They will also be aware though the Quins will pose tough opposition on their big day.

For now, Gloucester will build upon the momentum they've created. They're in a much better place than they were twelve months ago, strength in depth is developing and wins are being achieved despite not playing at 100%.

The challenge is to realise the undoubted potential of this squad, but the Cherry and Whites seem to be moving in the right direction.

After an opening few minutes with little to report, Gloucester were forced to make a change with James Hook hit hard by Dean Hammond as he caught a high ball. The fly half went off to be assessed and was swiftly followed by the Worcester man.

The home side threatened first, May and Twelvetrees linking well but a catch and drive was denied and the home team had to settle for a Greig Laidlaw penalty, which was swiftly cancelled out by one by Ryan Lamb.

The visitors then silenced Kingsholm, as they won good turnover ball, spun it quickly left and Ben Howard sprinted home down the touchline. Lamb added an excellent conversion to give Worcester a 3-10 lead.

Gloucester promptly narrowed the gap thanks to some solid work from the pack. Firstly forcing Worcester to concede possession off their own put-in, the Gloucester eight then won a penalty and Laidlaw duly made it 6-10.

The home side then scored a cracker. Rob Cook countered from deep, the ball went wide to Jonny May who made good ground then kicked ahead, winning the ball from Charlie Mulchrone and the ball was popped up for Greig Laidlaw to score his first try for the club. The scrum-half then converted for 13-10.

The score owed much to May. His initial break and kick ahead created panic, he then tackled Mulchrone, won the ball and timed the pass perfectly to Laidlaw. On a night when he was always hungry for work, it was a superb contribution.

Gloucester wanted to kick on, but the next few minutes were very stop-start, as a number of Worcester players took a knee and required treatment. Perhaps the tactic was to slow the game down? It was working....

And Worcester were still very much in this game with Ben Howard a real threat every time he touched the ball. One break took great defensive work from Cook and Laidlaw to thwart the danger.

However, the Gloucester pack had the last word in the first half as they forced yet another scrum penalty and Laidlaw's deadly boot made the half time score 16-10.

It had been a messy first 40 minutes in all honesty, with no flow at all to the game. Gloucester were trying to get the ball wide to May and Sharples, but the Worcester defence was hanging tough and chances were few and far between.

One area where Gloucester did have real supremacy though was at scrum time, and this could well prove to be the key in the second half if the Cherry and Whites could establish the appropriate field position.

However, the first ten minutes were largely frustrating for Gloucester. There was plenty of effort, but nothing was quite clicking and a Laidlaw penalty on 49 minutes was the only reward, and even that was immediately cancelled out by a penalty from Lamb.

Laidlaw restored the nine point gap at 22-13 with his fourth penalty of the evening as Sharples was tackled high but it was still tough going for the home side despite enthusiastic backing from the home crowd.

Gloucester finally gave themselves genuine breathing space on 67 minutes when Matt Kvesic touched down as the pack got their catch and drive going to good effect.

That was as good as it got though, as the conversion drifted wide and, despite some more enthusiastic attacking, the Warriors defence stiffened once again and Gloucester simply couldn't break through.

The game's final few moments very much told the tale of the evening. Gloucester pushed hard in search of a third try, Willi Heinz darting towards the line but a Worcester leg got under the ball and the TMO, quite rightly, ruled that no try had been scored.

JC