

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, JANUARY 9, 2016

SANDY PARK – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**GLOUCESTER RUE EARLY ERRORS AS CHIEFS EARN 19-10 VICTORY
AT SANDY PARK**

EXETER CHIEFS 19 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 10

Fight as they might, Gloucester simply couldn't overcome a nightmare opening quarter when, playing into the teeth of the wind, they conceded three tries. Exeter took full advantage on their way to a 19-10 win.

The most frustrating aspect of this defeat was that the three Chiefs tries were largely created by Gloucester errors. Apart from that, the home side genuinely didn't create that much in attack.

Unfortunately, it proved to be just about enough. The Cherry and Whites dusted themselves off after that triple body blow, and probably edged the possession and territorial battles for the rest of the game. There wasn't that much between the two sides.

However, that opening quarter when the wind was at its fiercest proved to be decisive. When the teams turned around at half time, Gloucester made good use of it and dominated field position but simply couldn't break down a dogged Chiefs defence.

Charlie Sharples crossed with 10 minutes left to play to give Gloucester hope of a losing bonus point, but it was simply a case of too little, too late. It all added up to a very frustrating day at the office.

Gloucester will leave Sandy Park knowing that they are not that far away - the Chiefs, after all, are enjoying a cracking season. But, for now, it's all about learning the lessons from today and putting things right ahead of the visit of La Rochelle next weekend.

Before the game, weather conditions on the way to Sandy Park weren't promising, and it was a similar tale at the ground in the build up to the game. Thankfully, the rain abated somewhat but the ubiquitous gale was still present. The pitch held up remarkably well though.

Gloucester were playing into said wind in the first half, and spent the first few minutes tackling in and around their own 22 as the home side applied early pressure.

Gloucester weathered that, but gave away a try in unfortunate circumstances. Julian Salvi was up quickly on James Hook and charged down his attempted chip. Thomas Waldrom poured through, hacked ahead and scored. Steenson added the easy conversion.

The wind was playing havoc with Gloucester's kicking game at this point, box kicks and attempted clearances going nowhere and mostly backwards.

And this led to the Chiefs second try on 10 minutes. Cook's clearance from near his own line only made a few metres, the home side set up their catch and drive and Waldrom finished it off for a 12-0 lead.

The Cherry and Whites dug deep in an attempt to get back into the game and had a 5 metre lineout opportunity, only to lose possession and the home side cleared.

The third try wasn't far behind though, and it was largely down to Gloucester errors. A knock on a ruck set up a home scrum in a good position, from which Steenson chipped over the top. Purdy and Cook couldn't clear it up and Olly Woodburn gathered to score. Steenson converted for 19-0.

Again, Gloucester fought to try and get something. However, with referee Tempest either ignoring or unable to see the Chiefs back row continually fringing offside, it was proving to be tough going.

Half time came with no further addition to the scoreboard. It had been a tough 40 minutes for Gloucester, with some of the issues admittedly caused by their own errors. But it could have been worse and, unless the wind suddenly dropped at half time, Gloucester would now at least have the elements at their backs. The key was to use it wisely and not just kick for the sake of it.

Ross Moriarty was a half time replacement for Ben Morgan at half time as Gloucester looked to battle their way back into the game, and the first few minutes were played out in Exeter territory.

The Chiefs were now dealing with the capricious wind, dropped an up and under and fielded it from an offside position. Greig Laidlaw stepped up and opened Gloucester's account with a well-struck penalty.

As the second half minutes started to frustratingly tick by, Gloucester threw several of their replacements into the fray. Billy Burns almost made an instant impact, his dink over the top finding Bill Meakes but the centre had no support and was halted near the 22. The home side, understandably, used every opportunity to slow the game down and take time off the clock. Gloucester probed and tested the Exeter defence but got little change out of it.

Finally, though Gloucester got the breakthrough on 69 minutes. Concerted pressure in the home 22 created an overlap out wide. Rob Cook had to show quick hands as the tackle came in, but he managed to put Charlie Sharples into the corner.

Billy Burns added an excellent touchline conversion and the Cherry and Whites could now focus on the next score which would take them into losing bonus point territory.

Sadly, it never came. The home side actually finished with a flourish, looking for an unlikely fourth try having soaked up so much pressure. They came close as time expired but 19-10 was the final score-line.