

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, JANUARY 30, 2016

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**TIGERS BREAK GLOUCESTER HEARTS WITH LAST GASP TRY
FOR WIN**

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 18 LEICESTER TIGERS 19

Gloucester just couldn't hold on against the Tigers in a real arm wrestle at Kingsholm, Logovi'I Mulipola's late try snatching a 18-19 victory when the Cherry and Whites looked set to take the points.

It was a final outcome that was harsh on Gloucester. When Tommy Bell's conversion bisected the posts, it was the first time that the Tigers had led throughout.

However, Gloucester ultimately paid the price for not pressing home their advantage on the scoreboard in the first 20 minutes of the second half.

The Cherry and Whites actually got their tactics spot on playing into the wind at the start of the second half. They piled on the pressure for a good quarter of an hour but, crucially, came away with nothing to show for their efforts.

They camped on the Tigers line at times, but to be fair the defensive effort from the visitors was magnificent as they repelled everything that was thrown at them.

It proved to be costly as the Tigers launched a fightback in the final 11 minutes, and it was desperately disappointing for Gloucester who had defended like demons up to that point.

Peter Betham inspired a try out of nothing as Tommy Bell beat Charlie Sharples to a high cross kick and brilliantly offloaded to the winger who launched a counter attack, linking with Jordan Crane, that finished with a memorable try for Telusa Veainu.

James Hook steadied the ship with a 72nd minute penalty that made the score 18-12 to Gloucester, but the Tigers kept on coming, aided by finishing on the right side of some key decisions.

One glaring and vital knock on by a Tiger was missed, and Gloucester really found themselves up against it when Ben Morgan was yellow carded for pulling back a man off the ball. Then they seemed to have won a scrum penalty but a reset was the awarded.

The 14 men defended valiantly, but eventually ran out of numbers as Mathew Tait made a half break and offloaded to Logovi'I Mulipola who crashed over. The pressure was now on Tommy Bell, and the full-back held his nerve to kick the game-winning conversion.

It was a real kick in the teeth for Gloucester who had given it everything in front of a magnificent sell-out crowd. But it's a game of small margins as Director of Rugby David Humphreys reflected after the game and the Tigers found a way to win.

The first few minutes were hard-fought and tight as you'd expect. The Tigers dominated possession though, and had the first chance of points when Jacob Rowan was penalised at a ruck on the Gloucester 22.

On his old stomping ground, Freddie Burns stepped up and, to the delight of the home crowd, pulled his kick wide. The 'eeyore' chants could be heard in the city centre . . .

The Cherry and Whites had struggled for possession but gained a huge chunk of territory in one go when Steve McColl launched a cannon of a kick into the Tigers' 22.

Gloucester couldn't come away with anything, despite a 5-metre scrum, but were soon back in the red zone as Bill Meakes made a good break before a grubber from Billy Twelvetrees was carried over his own line by Tommy Bell.

Paddy McAllister was initially held up over the line, but Gloucester regrouped from the five metre scrum and James Hook sidestepped his way over to score before converting his own try.

Amazingly, Gloucester got their second try straight after the restart as the Tigers dropped an up and under. Meakes again took it on, before play was switched to the blindside and Halaifonua's deft offload put Ben Morgan over. The conversion hit the post but the Cherry and Whites had a 12-0 advantage.

It had been a good spell, but the Gloucester defence, which had been superb to this point, was then ripped open by a trademark chip and re-gather from Freddie Burns. The scramble defence just got back, but Marcos Ayerza was able to plunge over from a metre out and Burns converted.

Burns then had a chance to narrow the gap, but with off target with a 35th minute penalty. James Hook stepped up a minute later and showed him how it was done as Tommy Bell messed up under a Garryowen and was penalised for holding on.

There was still time for Gloucester to apply one last bit of pressure as an excellent Heinz kick pushed the visitors back, but the Tigers cleared and went into half time without further damage.

It had been a good 40 minutes for the Cherry and Whites, whose defence in particular had been tenacious. That said, the undoubted talent of Freddie Burns, well known in these parts, had still managed to find the key to unlock it.

That hinted at the danger that the Tigers still posed. But Gloucester had taken their chances well and, backed by a vociferous crowd, knew that they had it within themselves to win this.

The Cherry and Whites pressed hard in the opening minutes of the second half, trying to force home their advantage. Several times they threatened the Tigers line, but the defence from the visitors was superb.

Gloucester spent a full 17 minutes in and around the Tigers 22 but came away empty handed. And it looked as though they would pay a dear price as Leicester moved menacingly downfield, but it was Gloucester's turn to dig deep to keep their line intact.

However, after so much good defensive work and the storm seemingly weathered, the Tigers pounced from nowhere. James Hook's cross kick was well placed and Charlie Sharples competed well. But Peter Betham gathered the ball and, moments later, Telusa Veainu sprinted over.

It set up a massive final 10 minutes and the Cherry and Whites looked to delivered a crucial blow when Hook slotted a 72nd minute penalty.

However, the scene was set for late drama with referee JP Doyle taking centre stage. The man with the whistle didn't endear himself to an admittedly partisan home crowd and the pressure grew and grew until Mulipola's late rumble.

It can be a cruel game sometimes and the challenge now is to bounce back at Bath next Friday evening. It would certainly be sweet to do so at the Rec.

JC