

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2016

RECREATION GROUND – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**HOOK PUTS THE BOOT INTO BATH TO EARN RARE WIN
AT THE REC**

BATH RUGBY 11 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 15

In horrendous conditions at the Rec, it wasn't pretty but Gloucester fans won't give a jot as James Hook's five penalties ensured a hard-fought win over local rivals Bath at the Rec on Friday evening.

It was a result that looked highly unlikely after 20 minutes of play. By that point, Gloucester trailed 8-0, had conceded countless penalties, lost Tom Savage to the sinbin and barely left their own 22.

It was a time for brave hearts, bodies and minds. Backs against the wall, Gloucester dug deep, started to fight and claw for every inch of ground and, slowly but surely, fought their way back into the game.

Crucially, they went into half time just five points adrift as they trailed 8-3. Turning around with the elements at their backs, they now had a vital advantage.

Bath had also seemingly started to lose their way tactically a little. They'd gambled on the catch and drive early on but, as time ticked on, seemed bereft of ideas in the face of some tigerish defence.

And Gloucester used the weather conditions to the full, half-backs Heinz and Hook controlled the game beautifully, the pack barely conceded an inch at the set piece and the defence refused to be breached.

It wasn't an evening for slick backs moves, it was a night for playing in the right areas of the pitch and forcing areas. Gloucester did that perfectly and the boot of James Hook did the rest, kicking five penalties to earn the win.

There were some nervy moments towards the end as Bath tried desperately to hit back. However, having lost in the last minute six days ago, Gloucester weren't about to do so again and held on grimly.

The morale boost of this win can't be underestimated and the travelling supporters will celebrate long and hard. They deserve to – their support was magnificent.

Bath clearly set out with the intention of trying to take on Gloucester up front. Several penalty awards in the first 10 minutes allowed them to virtually set up camp in the Gloucester 22 as the Cherry and Whites struggled to get a decision.

Several times Bath went to the corner but were held out. However, Gloucester were doing so illegally according to Mr. Carley who maintained his track record of issuing yellows against the Cherry and Whites and sinbinned Tom Savage on 12 minutes.

The pressure told immediately. Minus a man up front, Gloucester were outgunned at the next catch and drive and Dominic Day touched down. Tom Homer's conversion hit the upright and stayed out.

From the restart, Gloucester finally moved into Bath territory, but it was fleeting as an Eastmond kick pinned them back deep and the Cherry and Whites promptly gifted the home side three points.

Steve McColl took a quick lineout which Billy Burns couldn't handle and was tackled behind his own line. From the five metre scrum, Gloucester were caught offside and Tom Homer made no mistake with the penalty.

It had been a frustrating opening for Gloucester who had enjoyed no possession and done nothing but tackle and concede penalties. However, they were finally awarded one themselves on 28 minutes for a deliberate knock-on and James Hook made it 8-3.

Hook then had a chance from wide out as Jacob Rowan won an excellent turnover on the deck but his effort was just short and Matt Banahan was able to clear.

Gloucester had finished the half slightly the better and, as referee Carley blew for half time, would possibly have been happy to still be in touch, trailing only by eight points to three.

It had been all hands to the pumps in the first 20 minutes when the Cherry and Whites couldn't buy a decision, but they had slowly worked their way back into the game.

With the benefit of their wind at their backs in the second half, could Gloucester now earn enough possession in the right areas of the pitch to launch a second half comeback?

Conditions started to worsen at half time, with the rain coming down heavier. The wind was still behind Gloucester and James Hook quickly took advantage with a long-range penalty, but it was swiftly cancelled out by one from Tom Homer as Bath maintained their five point advantage at 11-6.

The rain continued to teem down, and Hook was on target from distance again to get the Cherry and Whites back within striking range at 11-9 on 52 minutes as the boot continued to rule the day.

And so it proved again on 57 minutes, as Bath were penalised at scrum time and Hook maintained his good form off the kicking tee with his fourth penalty to edge his team into a narrow 12-11 lead.

The Cherry and Whites had slowly taken control of the game and Bath were struggling. Willi Heinz made a sharp break to force Bath to concede a penalty in the shadow of their own posts and Hook made it 15-11 with 15 minutes left to play.

It was now a question of not doing anything silly and closing the game out. That was easier said than done.

Predictably the home side threw the kitchen sink at Gloucester in the final stages, but couldn't get close enough to land the telling blow.

Quins are next up at Kingsholm next Saturday, and Gloucester will be keen to maintain their momentum.

But let's celebrate tonight first!

JC