

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2016

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

GLOUCESTER DOMINATE QUINS TO EARN IMPRESSIVE 28-6 WIN

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 28 HARLEQUINS 6

A dominating first half display paved the way for an impressive 28-6 victory over Harlequins at Kingsholm on Saturday, the Cherry and Whites outscoring the visitors by three tries to none.

The first 40 minutes saw Gloucester produce some of their best rugby of the season. The set piece and defence were rock solid, providing the platform for the Cherry and Whites to really take the game to Quins.

The visitors looked a bit flat but, in their defence, were very much forced on to the back foot by the pace and power of the Gloucester offensive and their cause wasn't helped by the loss of Nick Evans at half time.

But, apart from a few minutes towards the end of the second half when they put Gloucester under a bit of pressure, the visitors weren't much of a factor. It was a day when the home side dominated.

The only slight negative on the day was perhaps not securing the try scoring bonus point but, as David Humphreys told the media after the game, it's about winning the games first and worrying about bonus points afterwards.

With more players set to return from injury before too long, things are looking good for Gloucester who are focusing on nothing more than taking care of their own business and not worrying what other teams are doing.

It was a dream start for Gloucester as Charlie Sharples took the kick-off, stepped through the chasers and broke downfield. He kicked ahead and forced Marland Yarde to carry over his own line.

Gloucester forced a free kick from the ensuing five metre scrum, the forwards set up great possession and James Hook shrugged off Matt Hopper, stepped inside a couple of tackles and reached for the line. The fly-half then converted his own try for an early 7-0 lead.

The Cherry and Whites failed to gather the restart though, and had to soak up a huge amount of pressure in the next few minutes. Steve McColl almost came away with an interception but Nick Evans narrowed the gap with a penalty from the resulting scrum.

Sharples was looking lively in these early stages and it was his half break that set up the field position from which Quins came in at the side of a maul, and Hook made it 10-3.

And Sharples' kick and chase led to another chance shortly afterwards. Billy Burns chipped ahead and was taken late by Ross Chisholm. The Quins full-back was sinbinned and Hook nudged over the penalty for a 13-3 lead after 18 minutes.

Evans narrowed the gap with his second penalty, but robust defence and another chase downfield from that man Sharples gave Gloucester another five metre scrum on 25 minutes. It was a chance but McColl was tackled into touch at the corner.

It proved to be a temporary reprieve. Gloucester kept up the pressure, Heinz and Sharples combined to send Kvesic thundering into the 22, Meakes almost made the line but Ben Morgan was on hand to pick up and drive over. Hook converted for 20-6.

The Cherry and Whites didn't let up. They repelled the odd Quins attack, but still looked dangerous in attack and Hook stretched the lead to 23-6 with a 38th minute penalty.

That was it for the first half scoring as referee Wayne Barnes brought a close to proceedings, and an excellent 40 minutes for Gloucester came to an end.

The platform had been set up front, where the Gloucester pack certainly had the bit between their collective teeth while, behind the scrum, the backs were looking dangerous. And, crucially, the defence hadn't given Quins a sniff.

The visitors were looking rattled – could Gloucester withstand any attempted comeback and close out the win?

Hook was off target for the first time on 44 minutes as he dragged a penalty wide, and then Billy Burns was denied a try for a forward pass.

Quins looked to be on the ropes, but Hook was off target with another difficult penalty attempt and the visitors continued to hang in there as a raft of replacements saw the game lose a bit of cohesion.

Indeed, the next best scoring chance was butchered by the visitors as Tim Visser broke down the left, but ignored an unmarked man inside him and the Gloucester defence held out. Credit to Callum Braley for a huge tackle on the big winger and Sione Kalamafoni for winning the turnover.

The pace was nothing like it had been in the first half, that would have been difficult to match, but it was good to see the urgency Gloucester put into their defensive work as Quins battled to get back into the game.

And it paid off as full time loomed. Rob Cook gathered a loose ball, the ball was shipped wide and Mark Atkinson straightened the line superbly. Callum Braley took a great support line, fed Hook and the fly-half put Steve McColl over the in the corner.

Even then, with just a minute or so left on the clock, Gloucester had the adventure to seek the fourth try, and threatened briefly, but it wasn't to be.

But, when the dust settles, it's a very good win and the squad will travel to Allianz Park next weekend in good spirits.

JC