

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, MARCH 5, 2016**

**KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**GLOUCESTER HOLD ON FOR NAIL-BITING WIN OVER WASPS**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 13 WASPS 10**

Gloucester and Wasps slugged out an absolute thriller at Kingsholm on Saturday afternoon, Gloucester overcoming four players lost to injury to cling on for a memorable 13-10 win over Wasps.

It was an impressive win over an in-form opponent, but it wasn't one for the faint-hearted or for those with blood pressure problems!

Despite the Cherry and Whites dominating huge chunks of the game, particularly in the first half, Wasps hung in doggedly and had a chance to snatch a draw with the last kick of the game, only for Jimmy Gopperth's drop goal attempt to slide wide.

That they were still in the game at this point would have amazed a neutral observer, but it was credit to their sensational effort in defence and the fact that they ruthlessly exploited the only Gloucester defensive mishap on the day.

Gloucester took the game to their opponents from the off, refusing to sit back and watch Wasps weave more of the magic they have unleashed in recent weeks. Time and again, they laid siege to the Wasps line, but only crossed once in the first half through Richard Hibbard.

Despite having dominated, there was a niggling doubt that Gloucester hadn't put enough points on the board in the first 40 minutes and that, like a cobra, Wasps were biding their time ready to strike.

And so it proved to be. Christian Wade exploited the first half chance that came his way and Gloucester were pegged back at 10-10 only four minutes into the second half.

It was a real kick in the teeth, and the game could easily have slipped away from Gloucester given the disappointment of being pegged back so quickly.

But Gloucester showed great mental strength to go back to what had served them so well in the first half, and quickly got on the front foot.

There was little to choose between the two teams for the final half hour, both defences were awesome, and it was incredible that there was only one more score to come. Thankfully for Gloucester, it was a Greig Laidlaw penalty!

Even then, Gloucester made it interesting, failing to control their own scrum ball with no time left on the clock. It gave Gopperth his last-ditch chance but, thankfully, the Kiwi was off target.

The win keeps Gloucester in the running for a top six spot, and the confidence boost from beating a team bang in form like Wasps cannot be underestimated.

The Kingsholm factor was also significant today, the support from the crowd was magnificent and the team can't count on that for the next couple of weeks. Trips to Worcester and Irish are significant, but Gloucester are in a good state of mind.

On a crisp but dry afternoon at Kingsholm, it was a bright start from the Cherry and Whites. Greig Laidlaw had an early penalty chance when Wasps held on to the ball in the tackle, and the skipper made it 3-0.

However, the Cherry and Whites were then forced to rearrange their backs when Rob Cook stayed down after making a tackle. There was a lengthy delay but Cook did walk off under his own steam to be replaced by Billy Burns.

The Gloucester pack looked in fine collective form in these opening exchanges, getting the upper hand at scrum and maul time. Their superiority led to some good possession in the Wasps 22, but the visitors held firm in defence.

Another man in fine form was Charlie Sharples and his break set up the first try. Gloucester had to work for it, keeping the ball for several phases, making yardage a bit at a time before Richard Hibbard crashed over from close range. Laidlaw added an easy conversion.

Henry Purdy though picked up a knock in the build-up, and Gloucester couldn't replace him before play resumed. Wasps craftily attacked that area of weakness and it led to a penalty from Jimmy Gopperth. Trinder replaced Purdy as the kick was taken.

The Cherry and Whites were quickly back on the front foot, but couldn't quite make a further breakthrough, one potentially scoring pass from Trinder to Sharples just not quite on the mark.

But Wasps held out once again, and Gloucester were dealt a further blow on 31 minutes when Paddy McAllister became the third player to be forced off due to injury. A sad end to a big week for the prop who became a father this week.

The Cherry and Whites continued to pile on the pressure and, credit to Wasps, they continued to muscle up in defence. There was one final scoring opportunity for Gloucester on the stroke of half time, but Laidlaw was just off target with a long-range penalty.

It had been a pulsating first half from Gloucester, and many other teams would have been blown away. However, Wasps had produced a phenomenal defensive display meaning that the one concern was that not enough points had been scored.

It had also been a brutal first half in physical terms – Cook, Purdy and McAllister all going off injured.

But Gloucester could take great heart from controlling the game in the way they had in the first 40 minutes. Could they keep it up after the break?

Unfortunately, the lead lasted just three minutes. Gloucester's defence was a bit narrow and a long pass gave Christian Wade room to run. The winger needed no second invitation, broke a tackle and burst clear to score. Gopperth converted to level matters at 10-10.

After so much dominance, it was a kick in the teeth for Gloucester and they would have to regroup rapidly.

To their credit, Gloucester duly did so and went back to how they'd gone about their business in the first half. Both teams were slugging it out, going toe to toe, but Gloucester edged back in front with a 57th minute penalty from Laidlaw.

As the game entered its final 15 minutes, it was still nip and tuck but, incredibly, Gloucester then lost another man to injury when Billy Burns was stretchered off.

The Cherry and Whites didn't try and sit on their lead, they still tried to take the game to Wasps but scoring opportunities were few and far between. Laidlaw was fractionally wide with another penalty attempt but that was as good as it got.

And, with time ticking by, Wasps started to ask more of Gloucester in defence. Mariano Galarza produced one superb lineout steal to kill off one attack, but Wasps kept on coming.

It went to the wire. Gloucester had a scrum as time expired but were turned over. All they could do was tackle, and then watch as Gopperth lined up his drop goal.

Thankfully, it drifted wide and the celebrations began.