

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, MARCH 12, 2016

SIXWAYS – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**GLOUCESTER SLIP TO FRUSTRATING DEFEAT
AWAY AT WORCESTER**

WORCESTER WARRIORS 28 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 20

Sixways has not been a happy hunting ground for Gloucester in recent seasons, and it lived up to its reputation again on Saturday as a first half brace from Bryce Heem paved the way for a 28-20 Worcester win.

Gloucester had already beaten the Warriors three times this season, but couldn't make it four on a disappointing afternoon just up the M5.

It's not been a great season for Worcester, but they've gradually acquired some hard-nosed rugby nous from all four corners of the globe, and those individuals were at the centre of some of the key moments.

Dean Ryan's side have strung together a few wins, the self-confidence has increased as a result and they were deserved winners today.

But Gloucester will probably be most disappointed with themselves. The difference between last week's win over Wasps and today's performance was like night and day. There was little to choose between the two sides but key errors led to all three Worcester tries.

James Hook's late try hinted at a possible comeback for the Cherry and Whites and there was a late flurry, but Worcester held on to complete a disappointing afternoon for Gloucester.

In terms of a top six finish and qualification for the Champions Cup, next week's game at London Irish takes on added importance. Gloucester will have to be better than today.

It was an inauspicious start. Ryan Mills looped a kick over the top of David Halaifonua, Bryce Heem gathered the bouncing ball and then broke two tackles to score. It was a soft try to concede. Heathcote converted and the home side were off to a flyer.

The next few minutes didn't get much better as Willi Heinz limped off having apparently aggravated his calf injury, while James Hook dragged a tricky penalty wide left.

However, Gloucester slowly regrouped and finally got their reward after a period of pressure. A long lineout over the top to Charlie Sharples created the position, before Callum Braley's grubber behind the defensive line was pounced on by Bill Meakes for the try. Hook converted to level the scores.

Worcester hit back and enjoyed their best spell of the game as they set up camp in the Gloucester 22. The Cherry and Whites defended well, but were eventually caught offside in the backs and Heathcote had an easy penalty to restore the lead at 10-7.

Gloucester were quickly back on the front foot though and James Hook slotted a 30th minute penalty to restore parity once again as the ebb and flow of the game continued.

The game then took a decisive swing towards the Warriors as half time approached. Under pressure defending their own line, Gloucester saw Ross Moriarty yellow carded before being outflanked out wide as Heem dotted down for his second of the day.

Heathcote couldn't convert having received lengthy treatment but the home side had nudged their way back in front and it stayed that way until half time.

The game was still very much in the balance, and much would depend on how Gloucester coped for the duration of the Moriarty's sin-bin period.

For much of the game, the Cherry and Whites had looked solid and they would need to start playing the game in the Worcester half again if they were to emerge triumphant.

But, it was Worcester who came out looking the more likely to score and they duly extended their lead on 52 minutes, ironically after Gloucester were back up to full strength.

A crafty grubber from Hougard was knocked on and forced a 5 metre scrum and, following a few phases of play, hooker Niall Annett forced his way over. Heathcote converted for a 22-10 lead.

Gloucester responded by sending Yann Thomas, Steve McColl and Henry Trinder into the fray and duly narrowed gap with a 56th minute penalty from James Hook. However, this was swiftly cancelled out by Heathcote's second penalty of the afternoon.

Gloucester weren't quite done yet though, and things got interesting with 13 minutes left to play as James Hook stepped his way over and converted his own try to reduce the gap to 25-20.

Heathcote duly punished Gloucester for more indiscipline though with a 71st minute penalty. It was harsh, Galarza was pinged for not rolling away but Hougard appeared to be kneeling on his chest and preventing the lock from moving.

The penalty took Gloucester out of losing bonus point range and, despite some late pressure, and a couple of half chances, it wasn't to be as Sixways celebrated and Gloucester were left to reflect on a poor day at the office.