

GLoucester Rugby

SATURDAY, APRIL 2, 2016

WELFORD ROAD – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

BRAVE GLOUCESTER DENIED AT THE DEATH
BY RELENTLESS TIGERS

LEICESTER TIGERS 35 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 30

Gloucester Rugby produced a battling display at Welford Road on Saturday afternoon, but were overhauled in the final few minutes by the never-say-die Tigers who edged a 35-30 thriller.

Missing 18 players for a variety of reasons, Gloucester came to the Tigers' lair and will wonder how they didn't leave with the win. The Cherry and Whites led 13-27 at half time and, despite being clawed back, were still hanging on with just six minutes left to play.

But a key phase of play then swung the game, and result, decisively the way of the home side. Henry Trinder tried to intercept, knocking the ball up in the air, but was held back as he tried to gather.

Had he been allowed to gather, the centre looked as though he would go the distance. Leicester promptly scooped the ball up and ruthlessly went down the other end to score through Vereniki Goneva and snatch the win.

It was harsh on a Gloucester team who fought back bravely having taken the body blows of the first few minutes. Trailing 10-0, it seemed as though Leicester were going to go for the jugular but Gloucester hit back and three quick tries saw them stun the Welford Road crowd.

However, crucially, Leicester won a key decision on the stroke of half time and Owen Williams kicked a penalty which kick-started the comeback. The decision looked tough on Matt Kvesic, but those are the breaks at Welford Road.

The second half they saw the Tigers throw the kitchen sink at Gloucester, and they steadily made inroads into the lead. Even then, Gloucester looked as though they would hold out, but it wasn't to be.

In hindsight, not finishing off one of the several good scoring opportunities created in the second half was pivotal. There was only a Greig Laidlaw penalty to show for their efforts. Gloucester spent plenty of time in the Leicester 22, but they didn't cross the try line.

It's been a tough few weeks for the Cherry and Whites and their faithful supporters, who had travelled in good numbers again today. Another losing bonus point doesn't help the push for a top six place, and a key European quarter-final beckons.

There are positives to take into that game. The pack went toe to paw with the formidable Tigers eight, Laidlaw and Hook executed the game plan nicely and the likes of Trinder and Marshall looked dangerous, the latter getting better week by week.

And, while five tries leaked might not sound too great, the effort in defence was stupendous at times. **It's** fine margins at the moment, and Gloucester are finishing on the wrong side of them. Next week is another opportunity to put that right.

In bright sunshine at Welford Road, Gloucester made a really positive start, maintaining possession and stretching the Tigers defence. A penalty for not rolling away followed and Greig Laidlaw's penalty opened the scoring.

However, the lead was short-lived. Slick hands across the back line, a powerful carry and offload by Manu Tuilagi to Betham and Telusa Veainu had a clear run to the line. Williams couldn't convert but Leicester had their noses in front.

And the home side pounced again after 12 minutes. A quickly taken tap had Gloucester at sixes and sevens and, although the scramble defence slowed the surge, a long floated pass to Peter Betham was flipped back inside for Manu Tuilagi to score.

The Cherry and Whites needed a break, but they were out of luck when they charged the ball down twice in the Tigers 22 and got no reward for either. However, Matt Kvesic produced a trademark steal on 20 minutes and Laidlaw made it 10-6.

Gloucester then had to produce some incredible defence to keep the home side at bay, and benefitted as Hook picked off an errant pass, set off downfield and offloaded to Steve McColl to run in the try. Laidlaw converted to give Gloucester a 10-13 lead.

Things got even better as Laidlaw broke from the restart to take play into the Tigers 22. Some powerful ball carrying followed before Henry Trinder, given a bit of space, produced a sensational step off his right foot to glide over. Laidlaw converted again for 10-20.

Remarkably, Gloucester then scored a third. More patient build-up play in the Tigers 22 took play to within a metre of the Tigers line, from where Paddy McAllister powered his way over. Laidlaw converted superbly from the touchline.

It had been a fantastic 12 minutes or so from Gloucester but they couldn't quite hold out until half time. Matt Kvesic was harshly penalised at the breakdown, it looked as though the decision should have gone the other way, and Williams' penalty made it 13-27 at half time.

It had been a half of two halves. Leicester had come out strongly and looked set to blow Gloucester away. However, a massive defensive effort from the Cherry and Whites seemed to turn the tide and Gloucester looked terrific in attack.

A big 40 minutes lay ahead – could Gloucester hold on? Key to this would be keeping Tigers at bay for as long as possible at the start of the second half and, preferably, adding to the points tally.

Predictably, Leicester came out all guns blazing and it took more committed defence to keep them at bay, plus a bad knock on when well placed by Adam Thompstone.

However, the pressure built and the score came. There looked to be a hint of a block as Manu Tuilagi found a metre of space and the England centre broke a tackle to score. Williams converted and the Tigers were back in it at 20-27.

The home side were quickly back on the front foot and back in Gloucester territory and a blocking runner saved Gloucester on one occasion, but Williams narrowed the deficit to 23-27.

Gloucester hit back and Morgan and Rowan so nearly made the line, but a real home town call from the officials saved the day for the Tigers as Darren Dawidiuk was penalised for illegal use of the boot.

Greig Laidlaw did finally settle the nerves though on 66 minutes as Leicester played the ball illegally at a Gloucester ruck, and the scrum-half slotted his third penalty of the afternoon to make it 23-30.

The seesaw nature of the game continued. Gloucester lost a key lineout on their own 22, that man Tuilagi again made the half break and his offload out of the tackle put Peter Betham over. Williams couldn't convert so Gloucester clung on to a 28-30 lead.

Then came the key talking point. As Tigers counter-attacked in their own half, Henry Trinder went for the interception, tapping the ball up and looking to re-gather and set off for the line.

He was held back by a Leicester player, and Gloucester players and fans alike screamed for a penalty. None came, Leicester moved downfield and Vereniki Goneva went over for the go-ahead score.

Even then, the Cherry and Whites possessed the character to go for the win. They laid siege to the home line for phase after phase, inching ever closer but were turned over to the delight of the home hordes as referee Doyle awarded the penalty to effectively end the game.