

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, APRIL 15, 2016

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**GLOUCESTER DIG DEEP TO FIGHT TO THRILLING WIN
OVER CHIEFS**

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 16 EXETER CHIEFS 9

Gloucester produced one of their finest performances of the season at Kingsholm on Friday evening, battling to a 16-9 Aviva Premiership victory over the high-flying Exeter Chiefs, Ollie Thorley's debut try proving to be key.

After the disappointments of recent weeks, Gloucester needed a win and they duly delivered in front of a raucous Kingsholm crowd.

It was a game that fizzed from beginning to end, with both sides running themselves into the ground in a bid to snatch the win. It was intriguingly poised at half-time, no points to either side, but it had been an enthralling encounter up to that point.

However, the points started to flow after the resumption and it was a dream try on his Premiership debut from Ollie Thorley that proved to be the difference.

Even then, the Chiefs, as you'd expect from a side riding high in the table, refused to go away and had a great chance to level matters when James Short broke clear, but the replacement wing simply lost his grip on the ball and the chance was lost.

No-one will begrudge Gloucester the win though, such was the passion and commitment of the performance. The defence was phenomenal, the attack was more clinical than in recent weeks and, in Greig Laidlaw, they have a kicker who will keep the scoreboard ticking over.

It shows what this team, even shorn of several starters, is capable of achieving when they hit their straps. Consistency, of course, is the trickiest of things to achieve but the Cherry and Whites can take great heart from this win.

With a steady drizzle falling at kick-off, the weather gods were not smiling kindly on GL1, and the opening exchanges were fairly predictable in the conditions; lots of kicking and lots of one-out rugby. Exeter had the first real opportunity as they kicked a penalty to the corner but Gloucester's close-range defence was magnificent.

The Cherry and Whites' first foray into the Chiefs 22 came courtesy of a crafty kick from Twelvetrees, with Tom Marshall following up with a huge hit on Lachlan Turner. However, the visitors escaped unscathed.

More pressure followed as Marshall produced a sensational break. The forwards tried desperately to punch their way over, but the Exeter defence held firm and the chance was gone when Trinder's grubber for Thorley to chase ran dead in goal.

It was hard-nosed uncompromising stuff, no quarter asked and none given. Both defences were putting their bodies on their line, Savage and Morgan shining for Gloucester with Hibbard and Moriarty not far behind, and scoring chances were virtually non-existent.

That said, it was enthralling stuff and the Kingsholm crowd responded in fine style to the commitment being shown by the home team. There may not have been any points scored, but the action was gripping.

It was also physical. Exeter lost Lachlan Turner temporarily with a head injury, swiftly followed by the influential Geoff Parling as the big hits took their toll.

Half time arrived without any score, and neither side could really claim that they had gained the ascendancy. An intriguing second half lay in wait – surely it wouldn't stay scoreless for much longer?

It didn't! From the first phase of play, a Gloucester tackler didn't roll away and Gareth Steenson kicked the penalty for the first points of the evening.

It stung Gloucester into action, particularly Ben Morgan. The number eight produced a rampaging run to take play into the Exeter 22, Gloucester stayed patient, probed for the opening and eventually Tom Savage went blindside before offloading for Ollie Thorley to score on his Premiership debut. Laidlaw converted for 7-3.

Kingsholm was on fire as the crowd responded to the score, but Exeter hit back quickly as Steenson slotted his second penalty after a late tackle on Harry Williams.

A few soft penalty calls went against the Cherry and Whites and Exeter had a wonderful chance to take the lead from a 5 metre lineout, but a timely turnover for Gloucester on their own line saved the day.

And it proved to be key as Gloucester duly moved downfield and extended the lead to 10-6 with a 62nd minute penalty from Greig Laidlaw, only for Steenson to immediately respond in kind and make it a one point game again at 10-9.

Controversy then reigned as Jack Nowell tip-tackled Ollie Thorley. It looked a nailed on red-card by the letter of the law, but the England wing escaped with a yellow. However, Laidlaw punished the crime with his second penalty.

The Kingsholm crowd and, crucially, the team now had real self-belief. The pack muscled up and forced a penalty at a set scrum and Laidlaw slotted his third penalty.

Things were looking good, but Gloucester certainly dodged a bullet when Short broke clear from his own half but lost his grip on the greasy ball when well placed to score.

Recent weeks have taught us not to take anything for granted when holding on to a lead going in to the closing stages but, on this occasion, Gloucester held their nerve and onto possession to close out the game to send Kingsholm into raptures.

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