

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2016

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**TIGERS SECOND-HALF FIGHTBACK STUNS GLOUCESTER
AT KINGSHOLM**

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 31 LEICESTER TIGERS 38

An incredible match at Kingsholm finished in agony for Gloucester as Leicester overturned a 31-7 second-half deficit to score two tries in the last three minutes and snatch a dramatic 31-38 victory.

Gloucester looked well set for the full five points when they led 31-7 early in the second half, but the forward power of Leicester took over in the final half-hour and left the Cherry and Whites wondering where it all went wrong.

The Cherry and Whites will look back on this and debate how they could be so good for 45 minutes and then slip away so badly in the final half hour.

In that first period of the game, they took the game to the Tigers in irresistible fashion, with the visitors frankly lucky to get seven points given there was a glaring forward pass in the build up to their try.

However, the Tigers crucially got back straight away as Gloucester made a number of replacements and lost Matt Kvesic to the sinbin. Having failed miserably to find a chink in Gloucester's defensive armour to that point, they ruthlessly launched catch and drive after catch and drive and the Cherry and Whites couldn't find an answer.

Gloucester had dominated possession and territory in the first half, but could now barely lay hands on the ball and didn't help matters by giving away some needless penalties which allowed Burns to work the lines in style.

That said, Gloucester were clinging bravely to a seven point lead with fewer than ten minutes remaining and had a long range chance to kick for goal and extend the lead to ten points. However, they went for the corner, lost possession and saw the Tigers hit back to snatch the win.

It was gut-wrenching stuff for Gloucester and their fans who looked all set to clinch a famous victory. It wasn't to be and defeat leaves a very bitter taste in the mouth this evening.

It was a pulsating start from Gloucester who kept the ball alive for a good three minutes after Freddie Burns missed touch with his first kick of the evening.

The Tigers defence was solid, but opened up by a good break from John Afoa after a lovely flat pass who unfortunately couldn't find the key offload to his support runners, and a knock on ended the threat.

The fast pace showed no sign of relenting, and Leicester slowly worked their way back into the game, Burns giving a hint of the danger he poses with one half break as he wriggled out of a tackle.

However, when the first try came, it was a cracker. Gloucester had been getting some joy down the left flank and created an opening which Tom Marshall exploited superbly. Billy Twelvetrees, in support, couldn't quite make the line but offloaded for Matt Scott to score. Greig Laidlaw added an excellent conversion.

The Tigers hit straight back though, amidst some controversy. A pass in their own 22 looked well forward before Veainu weaved his way downfield to take play deep into the Gloucester half.

Gloucester got back, but a clearance was charged down, Burns' grubber found Pietersen and he popped the ball up for Tuilagi to dive over. Burns added the conversion to level the scores.

Kingsholm seethed in indignation as the replay was shown on the big screens. The key now was how the Cherry and Whites responded to the setback.

The answer was positively. Standing up well in defence, the Gloucester line came up quickly and put Mathew Tait under pressure, a loose pass resulting. Charlie Sharples was on it in a flash, juggled it agonisingly for a moment but sprinted home from 60 metres. Laidlaw added the extras.

Tait was under the microscope again moments later, taking a quick lineout in his own 22 and then getting caught by the chase. He held on in the tackle, was duly penalised and Laidlaw's penalty made it 17-7 after 26 minutes.

It had all gone well thus far for Gloucester, but the half hour saw them dealt a blow as Billy Burns was smashed after he passed outside him. Was it late? Marginally? Nothing was given but the young fly-half carried on after lengthy treatment.

Burns almost punished the Tigers in the best possible way as he charged down a kick and set off for the line, but his offload, just a couple of metres short, was forward as McCaffrey got back to save the day.

But Kingsholm erupted from the next phase of play. Twelvetrees stepped out of a tackle to get Gloucester on the front foot. Swift hands found Ross Moriarty on the right wing, who stood up a tackler before finding Matt Scott on the loop and the centre sprinted home. Laidlaw converted again for 24-7.

The Cherry and Whites still found time to threaten before half time, but there was no further score before the interval.

It had been a cracking 40 minutes for Gloucester, but they would be all too aware of what happened a few short months ago when the Tigers launched an amazing comeback from what seemed like a forlorn position. Could the Kingsholm crowd roar Gloucester home?

Sadly, Billy Burns couldn't resume his duties, so Gloucester turned to the experienced James Hook to steer the ship.

And Hook quickly played a big part in proceedings. Leicester had started well but lost the ball in contact and Hook gathered. He found Henry Purdy who stepped inside a tackle and was then off to the races against his former club. Laidlaw's conversion made it 31-7.

But if Gloucester thought this game was dead they were mistaken. Good interlinking saw JP Pietersen dive over for his first Aviva Premiership try just a minute later. Burns converted from in front of the Shed.

Leicester were then very unlucky as Thompstone latched onto a kick downfield from Burns to win the race and score, only for the TMO to spot that he was a fraction in front of the kicker and therefore offside.

The Tigers now started to turn the screw, as they kicked for the corner three times in a row. Matt Kvesic saw yellow as Gloucester strived to keep their line intact. However, the fourth catch and drive resulted in a try for Sam Harrison and Burns' conversion made it a ten point game at 31-21.

When Burns then kicked his first penalty of the evening on 59 minutes, the Tigers had clawed their way back to within a converted try with plenty of time to play.

Nervous times indeed around Kingsholm, and the pack had to produce an incredible goal-line stand to keep the visitors at bay with 16 minutes left on the clock as Rowan came on to replace Kvesic.

It really was all hands to the pumps stuff now in defence for Gloucester as Leicester threw everything at them in attack. Every man was being called upon to do his fair share of tackling to protect the fragile lead.

A rare venture into Tigers territory then offered a possible penalty kick at goal. It was turned down in favour of kicking into the Leicester 22, but the lineout was lost as was Gloucester's last chance of points.

And Leicester drew level in cruel fashion. A dink over the top bounced horribly for Willi Heinz, JP Pietersen pounced and put O'Connor over. The conversion levelled the scores.

Incredibly it got worse for Gloucester. With no time left on the clock, yet another penalty was pumped deep into the Gloucester 22, the catch and drive ground inevitably towards the line and Harrison pounced to break Gloucester hearts.

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