

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2016

SIXWAYS – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**GLOUCESTER BATTLE BACK TO SNATCH THRILLING DRAW
AT SIXWAYS**

WORCESTER WARRIORS 23 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 23

For a while Gloucester looked dead and buried at Worcester on Friday evening, but showed great fortitude to hit back with two late tries and secure a nail-biting 23-23 draw and so very nearly the win.

It's a scary thing to contemplate, but Gloucester are already building a reputation for cliff-hanger finishes. Last week Leicester took the spoils. This week, at least Gloucester finished the stronger.

It was a pulsating finish to a game that had swung this way and that. Neither team could quite put the game to bed and Worcester actually played about 20 minutes with only 14 men after the sending off of Alafoti Faosiliva.

Matt Scott and Henry Purdy were the late try scorers, Greig Laidlaw converting both, but Gloucester will leave Sixways rueing the fact that they couldn't quite complete the comeback. A late attack seemed to cry out for a drop goal attempt, but a penalty was conceded and the chance was gone.

In hindsight, a very mixed day at the office for Gloucester. A good start and a good finish, but there will be large parts of the middle third of the game that Gloucester will want to forget.

To a certain extent, Gloucester were architects of their own downfall. The first two Worcester tries came from loose Gloucester passes, the third featured some weak tackling.

And the Cherry and Whites could point to a number of things that simply didn't go their way. Charlie Sharples had a try harshly disallowed; the scoring pass for the second Worcester try seemed to be forward.

But, taking things into consideration, Gloucester weren't good enough for long enough on the night to take the win. There are still elements of their game which need to be fine-tuned and, with a trip to Sale next Friday, there's a lot to work on this week.

Gloucester made a strong start, keeping hold of possession in the opening exchanges and taking play into the home 22. Eventually, a Warrior failed to roll away from the tackle area and Greig Laidlaw made no mistake with the penalty.

The Cherry and Whites had found their feet quickly on the new Sixways surface and after good work from Purdy and Kvesic, it took a good tackle to stop Ross Moriarty with the flanker in full stride.

But it was aggressive defence by Billy Twelvetrees that created the first try scoring chance, his tackle on Jackson Willison jarring the ball loose. Tom Marshall gathered and offloaded to Charlie Sharples who just made the line. However, the TMO ruled that the winger had stepped out of a completed tackle and the score was chalked off.

Having dodged a bullet, Worcester then got another break as a Billy Burns pass failed to find a Gloucester shirt. The ball was hacked downfield and Henry Purdy got back but could only carry over his own line. It gave the home side a great attacking position, but dogged defence prevailed.

However, the home team were gradually finding their feet and struck for a well-worked try on 21 minutes. Jonny Arr made the initial half-break, but it was Ben Te'o who finished as he latched onto a neat inside pass and powered over. Lamb was off target with the conversion.

The Warriors promptly dropped the restart to allow Gloucester to pile back into the 22, but Matt Scott couldn't quite hold on to what could have been a try scoring pass to temporarily relieve the pressure. That was until Greig Laidlaw restored the lead at 5-6 with a 26th minute penalty for the tackler not rolling away.

The lead was short-lived. A nice wrap-around move in midfield created an opening on the right and Cooper Vuna had enough pace and power to break Charlie Sharples' last-ditch despairing tackle and make the line. Lamb converted for 12-6.

Nothing was going Gloucester's way at this point. On two occasions, Worcester passes went astray but bounced kindly for the home side and, on 35 minutes, the Cherry and Whites lost the influential Ross Moriarty to injury.

One additional area of concern was the scrum. Both Warriors tries had come with the referee playing advantage for Gloucester misdemeanours, and another on 37 minutes gave Lamb a chance to extend the lead and he duly obliged.

Gloucester could have done with something before half time, but a promising position petered out and the Cherry and Whites returned to the dressing rooms with some hard thinking to do.

A good opening had unravelled as the big Worcester pack had slowly but surely gained the upper hand. The home side were certainly benefitting from the bounce of the ball, Sharples' disallowed try a case in point, but Worcester were definitely taking full advantage.

Gloucester would have to find a way to get back on the front foot and back into the game, but it wasn't going to be easy.

It was a promising start though. Worcester, now playing into a slight wind, failed to clear their lines, were caught offside and Greig Laidlaw slotted his third penalty of the evening with ease.

Gloucester then had a couple of real escapes, Lamb hitting the post with a very kickable penalty before the home squandered a five metre scrum having charged a kick down in the in-goal area.

A nasty moment followed as Alafoti Faosiliva led with the arm into a tackle, Mariano Galarza was on the receiving end and had to leave the field. A red card was shown to the Samoan. Would it prove to be pivotal?

Sadly, the next score went the way of the home team. Gloucester seemed to freeze with an advantage being played and Perry Humphreys took full advantage, shrugging off several tackles on his way to the left-hand corner and the third Worcester try.

Gloucester had to dig deep and, following a flurry of replacements, carved out their first try. Dawidiuk carried well but Mark Atkinson made the key break and offload with Matt Scott diving over under the posts. Laidlaw converted for 16-20.

So Gloucester had a lifeline, but the task became that little bit harder on 68 minutes when Tom Heathcote, on for Lamb, extended the lead to 23-16 as the Gloucester defensive line came up too quickly and was deemed offside.

Credit to the Cherry and Whites, they hit back. Cameron Orr unleashed a powerful run, Dawidiuk and Atkinson were both involved again but it was Henry Purdy who took Tom Marshall's offload to score and Greig Laidlaw's touchline conversion levelled the scores at 23-23.

Gloucester had the momentum and the bit between their teeth as they went in search of the winning score. They drove into the Worcester 22 and the home defence was at full stretch.

The situation seemed to be crying out for a drop goal, but one carry into contact too many saw a penalty conceded and referee Luke Pearce's whistle saw two points apiece the final outcome.