

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2016**

**AJ BELL STADIUM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**STREETWISE GLOUCESTER OFF AND RUNNING  
WITH HARD-FOUGHT WIN AT SALE**

**SALE SHARKS 13 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 26**

Gloucester clinched their first Aviva Premiership victory of 2016-17 with a clinical 26-13 win over the Sale Sharks at the AJ Bell Stadium on Friday evening.

After starting the season with a defeat and a draw, two games Gloucester could and maybe should have won, securing the first victory of the season this evening was important.

And, as always when a team visits the Sale Sharks, victory has to be earned the hard way. Steve Diamond's side are a team hewn in his own image, tough and difficult to beat.

But, despite a few wobbles along the way, Gloucester were good value for the win. They scored a couple of good first half tries, largely soaked up whatever Sale could throw at them at the start of the second half and then scored crucial late points.

The importance of that final quarter cannot be underestimated. Gloucester have seen so many games slip through their fingers in the final minutes of matches over the past couple of seasons. Tonight, that was never going to be the case.

Greig Laidlaw will take many plaudits, and rightly so. The skipper was magnificent on the night. But so was the team effort throughout. Every single man can look back on his contribution and know that he did his job.

The win moves Gloucester up to fourth place in the table for now. It is just one win, but everything looks a little rosier right now and everyone will be looking to back this performance up at home to Newcastle next weekend.

Gloucester started brightly in good conditions on the night, and were rewarded with a fine early try. Charlie Sharples got Gloucester moving down the right with a strong run, but it was a lovely show and go from Billy Burns that split the defence, John Afoa taking the scoring pass and going under the posts. Laidlaw converted.

However, Gloucester failed to clear their lines from the restart as a kick was charged down. Despite some dogged defence, Sale remained patient and eventually fashioned an opening for Sam James on the right and the centre crashed over.

Frustrated though they may have been at not holding on to the lead for longer, the Cherry and Whites quickly extended the lead as Greig Laidlaw knocked over a 16th minute penalty from just outside the 10 metre line.

Gloucester had lost Matt Kvesic to a blood injury by that point, Jacob Rowan entering the fray, but the flanker returned on 28 minutes just as the home team missed a kickable penalty courtesy of Dan Mugford.

It was mostly defensive duties at this stage for Gloucester, a number of penalties giving Sale the chance to set up camp in the Gloucester 22, but the Cherry and Whites held firm until Will Addison took over kicking duties on 35 minutes and slotted a penalty.

If Gloucester needed a kick up the backside, this produced it. Ben Morgan produced a barnstorming run in midfield but Tom Marshall couldn't quite pick a supporting line. No matter, a few phases later, Marshall rolled the ball through beautifully for Charlie Sharples to touch down.

Greig Laidlaw added the extras and Gloucester had a decent 17-8 lead at half time. Despite having to soak up a lot of pressure, the Cherry and Whites were looking up for the task in hand and it was a decent advantage to hold at the interval.

A solid start to the second half was required, and Gloucester started well despite losing Richard Hibbard temporarily to a blood injury. Thankfully, the hooker returned after five minutes or so of treatment.

Meanwhile, Sale replaced Sam James around whom so much of their attacking threat had revolved. His departure was a key one.

However, it was the home team who struck next. Continued pressure in the left-hand corner saw several kicks go to the corner and, eventually, Sale bundled over Cameron Neild to narrow the gap to 17-13.

You could forgive all Gloucester followers for getting tense at this point, recent weeks have led to this. But Greig Laidlaw helped to settle nerves with two penalties, on 65 and 67 minutes, to extend the lead to 23-13.

It was now desperation time for the home team but Gloucester were in no mood to let them back into it. Playing the percentages, Gloucester's playmakers pinned Sale back and forced them to play from deep.

Almost inevitably, another penalty followed and, equally inevitably, Laidlaw bisected the uprights to clinch an important 26-13 win and send the vocal travelling supporters home happy.

JC