

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2016**

**KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**GLOUCESTER LEFT WITH NOTHING TO SHOW FOR THEIR EFFORTS  
AGAINST BATH**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 6 BATH RUGBY 15**

It's a game of small margins at the highest level, and so it proved to be at Kingsholm on Saturday afternoon as two second-half Bath tries earned a 6-15 victory from a game which Gloucester had dominated for long periods.

The Cherry and Whites led until the 62nd minute and, even after Bath edged into a 6-8 lead, saw two penalties dip under the crossbar before a late try sealed it. It was that sort of day.

Losing to Bath is always a painful experience. Losing at home to them is even worse. To lose when having gone toe to toe with them in this fashion hurts even more.

There was actually plenty to admire about the Cherry and Whites play today but, unfortunately, there were still too many errors at critical times and Bath were able to capitalise. For Gloucester not even to take a losing bonus point from this one hurts badly.

The turning point really came on the hour mark. Gloucester had defended heroically for a long period, won a penalty and then cleared to halfway. Unfortunately, the lineout was lost and it led to Bath's first try.

Even then, Gloucester immediately had two long range penalty chances to re-take the lead. Greig Laidlaw had the direction on both occasions, but the kicks dipped tantalisingly under the bar.

There was to be no third opportunity and Bath duly demonstrated a clinical edge that Gloucester have been looking for in recent weeks. Matt Banahan swooped for the second try and the game was over.

Another tough day at the office and a lot to work on before the trip to Exeter next weekend.

Weather conditions had been distinctly mixed in the run up to kick off, but 3pm dawned with no rain and little breeze to speak of.

As expected, it was a pretty frenetic start and there were handbags after the conclusion of the first scrum. Bath had already been penalised but Greig Laidlaw was unusually off target with the penalty attempt, a collector's item after his recent hot streak.

It was actually really good stuff from Gloucester in the early exchanges but, as was the case last week, they were up against a pretty good defence and Bath were holding firm in the face of some powerful running.

The first 20 minutes were pretty attritional, and the scrums in particular a real arm wrestle. Penalties were awarded against both front rows with neither pack seemingly on top. The closest points attempt came when George Ford rapped an attempted drop goal against the left upright.

Gloucester, to be fair, were showing the greater ambition. But the pre-match downpours had obviously left the pitch greasy and the odd handling error, not unexpected in the circumstances, was thwarting their attacking efforts.

Finally, though, we had a breakthrough on 31 minutes. Gloucester's scrum won a penalty on halfway, James Hook took on the long-range attempt and made no mistake. The full-back was just short from even further out four minutes later.

And that was it for the first half as a gripping 40 minutes of action came to a close. There was little to show for both team's efforts on the scoreboard, and there was little in it on the pitch to be fair.

But it had been a proper good old-fashioned West Country derby to this point. The Cherry and Whites would probably feel that they hadn't gained enough reward for their attacking endeavours to date but Bath were also looking dangerous on occasion.

Everything to play for in the second half which was sure to be a tense one.

However, Bath started the better in the opening few minutes. They dominated possession, hung around the Gloucester 22 and eventually, with referee JP Doyle playing an advantage, George Ford levelled the scores with a drop goal.

Gloucester responded immediately, Bath dragging down a maul and Greig Laidlaw slotting the penalty to ease his team back into the lead. Ford had an immediate chance to respond but was off target.

The Cherry and Whites then found themselves under huge pressure as Bath threw everything at them. But the defence was magnificent and the Kingsholm crowd roared its approval.

But Gloucester then lost a key lineout on halfway and a Fotuali'I kick pinned them back deep. The pack held out the catch and drive, but the ball was moved swiftly left where Anthony Watson squeezed in at the corner for the game's first try.

It nudged Bath into a narrow 6-8 lead. Laidlaw had a long-range penalty chance to hit straight back but was agonizingly short with his attempt. Two minutes later, another attempt scraped under the crossbar. So close, but no cigar....

It was as close as Gloucester got, and Bath clinched the win five minutes from time. Willi Heinz was forced to carry over his own line after another cunning kick. From the 5 metre scrum, Matt Banahan was left unmarked on the left and rumbled over.

Ford converted to take Gloucester out of losing bonus point range and rub salt into an already painful wound.

JC