

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2016

KINGSHOLM – EUROPEAN RUGBY CHALLENGE CUP

**GLOUCESTER TOO STRONG FOR DOGGED TREVISO IN FEISTY
EUROPEAN ENCOUNTER**

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 37 BENETTON RUGBY 8

Gloucester made it two wins from two outings in this season's European Rugby Challenge Cup as they outplayed Benetton Treviso at Kingsholm to win by 37 points to 8, the bonus point try coming with the final play of the game.

A dogged effort by the Italian side, who frustrated Gloucester for long periods but didn't have enough to prevent the home side from securing a clear victory.

Patience was the key for the Cherry and Whites as the victory didn't come easy despite them very much dominating possession and territory.

Part of it was due to stern Italian resistance – Treviso came to town with a big, powerful pack and they were also well organised in defence. They posed less threat in attack, but they made Gloucester work hard for everything they got.

It was attritional stuff at times and very hard-fought. Tempers boiled over on a couple occasions and neither set of forwards was shy of mixing it with their opposite numbers.

However, Gloucester kept at it. Crucially, two of the tries came in the dying moments of each half – in the case of Callum Braley, his try was the final action of the match and secured a much-needed bonus point.

That try allows Gloucester to keep pace with La Rochelle at the top of the pool and set up a mouth-watering double header between the two sides in December.

But it's also an important win in terms of building momentum with a tough trip to Northampton lying ahead next Friday.

The afternoon got off to an understandably sad note as the Kingsholm crowd acknowledged the sad passing of Munster Head Coach Anthony Foley, and also of the former Gloucester Rugby Club Doctor, Rob MacKay.

After a minute's applause for both men, the game got underway in near perfect conditions.

Gloucester began brightly, moving the ball wide with both wings, May and Sharples, benefitting from an early touch of the ball. All the early exchanges were in and around the Treviso 22 without a clear-cut scoring chance being created.

Indeed, the first real incident saw Tom Savage go off with a blood injury, to be replaced by Freddie Clarke who was making his first team debut. Clarke's first contribution was to pack down in a scrum that led to Greig Laidlaw opening the scoring with a 12th minute penalty.

Charlie Sharples then very nearly set up the game's first try; his lightning break slicing open the defence, but Jonny May was bundled into touch near the corner as the Treviso cover tacklers just got across in time.

The Cherry and Whites had a couple of catch and drives held out in the next exchanges and settled for a second penalty from Laidlaw to extend their lead to 6-0.

Finally, the first try came on 24 minutes. It was a try borne of patience, going through multiple phases and winning the physical collisions to advance upon the line. Finally, Paddy McAllister drove forward before offloading perfectly for Lewis Ludlow to score. Laidlaw converted.

However, Treviso opened their account immediately as Gloucester failed to gather the restart and were then penalised at a ruck. Ian McKinley slotted the penalty.

Moriarty was then held up over the line and May again bundled into touch at the corner as Gloucester tried to turn the screw, only to end up frustrated as Treviso just held firm. Another chance came and went as half time approached, when Billy Burns dummied his way clear, backed himself but was dragged down just short.

But Burns was the creative genius a minute later, his chip over the top bouncing nicely for Jonny May to gather and race clear. A suitably exuberant dive celebrated the score! Laidlaw's conversion made it 20-3 at half time.

A satisfactory enough score-line at the interval, but Gloucester would more than likely be frustrated at not having converted more of their chances.

The positive was that the chances were being created. The immediate challenge now was to close out the game and, hopefully, secure the bonus point in doing so.

However, Treviso struck first after the resumption. Tomasso Benvenuti slipped a tackle in midfield, and the ball was quickly and efficiently shipped out to Michael Tagicakibau who just made it over in the right-hand corner.

Gloucester were quickly back in the Treviso half, and a powerful break from John Afoa very nearly created another try. However, the visitors held out again and a penalty from Laidlaw was the only reward.

There was ample return just a minute or so later, though. Treviso failed to find touch with a clearance and Gloucester countered in style. Neat hands across the backline created the overlap and Matt Scott cantered over. Laidlaw converted for a 30-8 lead.

It was now really just a question of getting the try scoring bonus point for Gloucester and Jonny May so nearly supplied it as he latched on to a neat grubber from Mark Atkinson but, agonizingly, couldn't quite hold on.

It looked as though the try wasn't going to come, but Gloucester kept pressing and the home crowd stayed behind them.

Mark Atkinson thought he was over but was called back, presumably for crossing, but Callum Braley was the hero of the day, darting around the fringes and fighting his way to the line.

The Italian Job completed – now on to Northampton.

JC