

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2016**

FRANKLIN'S GARDENS – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**MORE LATE HEARTBREAK FOR GLOUCESTER AS LATE SAINTS TRY  
EARNS NARROW VICTORY**

**NORTHAMPTON SAINTS 23 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 20**

A fantastic effort from Gloucester at Franklin's Gardens on Friday evening, as the Cherry and Whites were left to contemplate conceding a controversial first half try and a number of missed scoring opportunities as Northampton edged a tight one by 23 points to 20.

The final outcome was a bitter pill to swallow for a Gloucester side who gave it everything on the night. Once again, as they have been all season, they were competitive. Once again, they finished on the wrong end of a nail-biter.

The margins are so fine at the highest level and some key moments went against the Cherry and Whites this evening.

Controversy surrounds Louis Picamoles' first-half try, certainly according to the reaction on Twitter! Director of Rugby David Humphreys diplomatically avoided comment when quizzed about it after the game, but the frustration was clear to see.

Three penalties were also missed, two of which were eminently kickable for Greig Laidlaw, such are his incredibly high standards. Even so, Gloucester produced a battling second-half comeback and took the lead on the hour. However, they couldn't quite hold on as Picamoles produced a moment of legitimate genius to settle the game. It was that kind of evening.

What was clear on the night, however, was the sheer cussedness and commitment by the Gloucester squad. They didn't deserve to finish on the losing side but will need to stay tight and build upon the progress they are making. The tide will turn sooner or later.

Gloucester started brightly on the night, enjoying a decent share of possession in the opening exchanges. Jonny May was given one early opportunity to stretch his legs, but was just dragged down.

It led to a chance to kick for the corner, but the ball was lost in contact near the Saints line and the chance was lost as Harry Mallinder cleared.

But Gloucester certainly looked up for the fight in the next few minutes, and great work at the ruck by Matt Scott following a kick downfield from James Hook earned a penalty chance, but Greig Laidlaw was off target.

The home side were strangely subdued at this point and not quite at their best. However, George North did bring the crowd to its feet on 12 minutes only to be called back for a forward pass as he galloped clear.

The Cherry and Whites moved downfield and carved out another penalty opportunity, again through good work from Scott at the breakdown, but Laidlaw was unusually off target once more.

There was little to choose between the two sides as the first quarter came and went, despite plenty of endeavour, but Gloucester could feel pretty satisfied with their contributions, particularly in defence.

That was until the 26th minute, when a well-worked blindside move saw Ben Foden scamper into the 22. Louis Picamoles took it on and, despite suspicion of a double movement which led to a TMO referral, the try was given. Myler converted.

Twitter erupted as apparently the TMO gave no try only for referee Foley to ignore the adjudication and award the score anyway. TV commentary apparently expressed incredulity as well....

A really harsh decision against John Afoa after Picamoles had seemed to knock on then immediately gave Myler a chance to extend the lead and the fly-half made no mistake. After so much good work, Gloucester were suddenly trailing by 10.

To their credit, Gloucester dusted themselves off, battled back into Saints territory and it was third time lucky for Laidlaw as he bisected the posts for the first time and narrowed the gap to 10-3, only for Myler to promptly respond in kind.

With some wind in their sails, the home side came hard at Gloucester in the final couple of minutes of the half. But Gloucester held firm to remain in touch at the break, trailing by 13 points to 3.

It was a score-line that didn't really reflect the pattern of play. Gloucester had had their moments, but failed to come away with points from their visits to Northampton territory.

What Gloucester really needed was a stroke of luck, and they duly got one on 46 minutes as Saints failed to deal with a high ball. Twelvetrees and Morgan took the ball on, before Mark Atkinson stepped through and fired a long pass out to Jacob Rowan who broke a tackle to score.

Greig Laidlaw added an excellent touchline conversion and Gloucester were back in it at 13-10 and ruing the missed kicks in the first half.

However, ill-discipline in the forwards allowed Northampton to swiftly move downfield and into the red zone, and Myler had an easy kick for 19-10[*sic*].

The pack immediately redeemed themselves, forcing a scrum from some powerful counter-rucking and then a penalty at the set scrum that followed. Laidlaw slotted the kick and it was still finely poised at 16-13.

And to the joy of the travelling support, Gloucester took the lead. George North put a kick out on the full to give the Cherry and Whites great field position. Matt Scott hit a couple of great lines, but it was Billy Twelvetrees' miss pass that put Charlie Sharples over in the corner. Laidlaw added another superb conversion for 16-20 going into the final quarter.

Predictably, the home side came roaring back and it took a massive hit by Richard Hibbard to deny Rory Hutchinson to deny the replacement centre a try. It was all hands to the pumps in defence.

It was brave stuff from the Cherry and Whites but a succession of penalties drove them back into their own 22. Something had to give and, again, Louis Picamoles was at the heart of it, offloading superbly near the line for Tom Kessell to score. Myler's conversion made it 23-20.

It may have been a hammer blow for Gloucester, but they weren't finished just yet. James Hook had the courage to take on a penalty from bang on halfway but the kick fell just short.

And, even as time ticked away, Gloucester threw the kitchen sink at Northampton in a bid to get the winning score. They threatened on several occasions but one final penalty went against the Cherry and Whites and the home team escaped.