

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2016

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**GLOUCESTER TURN ON THE STYLE TO DOWN WASPS
AT KINGSHOLM**

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 36 WASPS 18

Gloucester produced one of their best performances of the season to defeat high-flying Wasps 36-18 at Kingsholm on Saturday afternoon, a vital and thoroughly deserved win in terms of the context of the season.

The final score-line looks comprehensive. However, as has often been the case this season, a nervy final few minutes looked on the cards for Gloucester until two late tries sealed the victory.

So many narrow results have gone against Gloucester this season that alarm bells could have started ringing when Wasps got back to within six points with six minutes left to play. But, credit to Gloucester, they saw this one out.

The significance of the win, against one of the in-form teams in the Aviva Premiership teams cannot be underestimated. This wasn't a lucky result, it was one based on a massive effort up front, half-backs controlling the game, backs taking chances when they presented themselves and solid defence.

Restricting a dangerous Wasps outfit is impressive, to score five tries against the visitors similarly so. It was an afternoon for the Kingsholm faithful to celebrate and they did so in some style.

With some big games coming in the next few weeks, it was vital that the Cherry and Whites got something out of this game and it doesn't get much better than five points.

As always, the challenge is now to back it up. A trip to Saracens next weekend is a daunting one, but one that Gloucester shouldn't be afraid of if they can front up as they did today.

After an inauspicious opening few minutes as both teams felt their way into the game, a Jacob Rowan turnover gave James Hook a long-range shot at goal and the full-back made no mistake to open the scoring.

The Cherry and Whites were soon under pressure though as Dan Robson's dink over the top forced Charlie Sharples to carry into touch near his own line. The catch and drive was perfectly executed, and former Gloucester flanker Thomas Young touched down to give the visitors a 5-7 lead.

Gloucester responded in positive fashion, Henry Purdy almost cutting through after a neat inside pass from James Hook and a catch and drive was halted just short of the line as backs piled in to help the pack.

The second catch and drive was irresistible, however, and hooker Richard Hibbard emerged with the ball to claim the try to the delight of the home crowd. Hook added a tricky conversion for a 10-5 lead after 22 minutes.

A fair amount of kick tennis followed in the next few minutes with neither side really able to gain the upper hand, although a break from his own 22 by Wasps full-back Rob Miller had alarm bells ringing until Christian Wade's knock on.

Heinz and Burns kicked well tactically as the clock counted down towards half-time. Wasps were being pinned back deep and the home crowd were warming to the gripping battle being played out in front of them.

Hook had a late chance to extend the lead as Wasps offended at a Gloucester line-out, but his effort was a real tester from long range and fell just short to send the home team into half-time with a narrow 10-5 lead.

It had been a pretty even affair to this point, and the Cherry and Whites could feel fairly pleased with their efforts to date. They'd managed for the most part to shut down a pretty dangerous Wasps backline while carving out some decent scoring chances themselves.

The tussle up front was also a fascinating one. Both packs had threatened to gain the ascendancy at times, but it was reasonably even-stevens at the halfway point.

Gloucester replaced Jacob Rowan with Matt Kvesic at half time, and quickly found themselves under pressure as Wasps came out all guns blazing. It took a fabulous lineout steal from Mariano Galarza to keep the visitors at bay.

The pressure was incessant and, when Gloucester were penalised at a scrum on the 22, Jimmy Gopperth slotted the penalty to narrow the gap to 10-8, before nudging his side in front a few minutes later as Gloucester offended again.

Thankfully, the response was immediate, a key turnover leading to a penalty chance for Hook but the full-back was off target with a very kickable chance.

Gloucester then benefitted from a huge slice of luck. Cipriani's clearance from his own 22 struck Dan Robson and bounced backwards. John Afoa hacked on, Cipriani couldn't clear up and Mark Atkinson pounced to touch down. Hook converted for 17-11.

Better was to follow as Atkinson sliced through the defensive line. He was grounded a yard short, but Matt Scott was on hand to pick up and dot down. Hook added the extras for 24-11.

Wasps may have been stunned, but were immediately back on the front foot, piling on the pressure in the Gloucester 22. However, a massive scrum effort, to the delight of the Shed, allowed the Cherry and Whites to clear.

The visitors weren't done just yet, though. With six minutes remaining, Ashley Johnson picked a great line and crashed through, Thomas Young the man on the spot once again to touch down. Gopperth converted and the lead was down to a nervy 24-18.

Wasps then poured forward again and moved menacingly towards the 22 through Cipriani and Wade. However, the latter threw a wild pass and Lewis Ludlow snaffled up the loose ball. Willi Heinz, excellent throughout, spotted space downfield, kicked ahead and Charlie Sharples had no-one with him as he gathered to score.

The celebrations started in earnest in the crowd, but there was one more score to come. Again it came off a turnover; the ball was hacked downfield by Matt Scott and Henry Purdy outpaced Ashley Johnson to put the icing on the cake.

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