

# GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, JANUARY 7, 2017

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

WORCESTER SWEEP ASIDE AS GLOUCESTER GET BACK  
TO WINNING WAYS

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 55 WORCESTER WARRIORS 19

After a couple of disappointing results, Gloucester took out their frustration on Worcester at Kingsholm on Saturday afternoon, running in seven tries on their way to a 55-19 Aviva Premiership victory.

In front of another superb home following, this was a result and a performance that has been coming for quite some time after a number of narrow defeats in the Premiership this season.

Matches between these two teams are traditionally hard-fought, tense affairs but Gloucester delighted their supporters by taking the game by the scruff of the neck and establishing a decent lead early on.

And this week, there was only the slightest hint of a Worcester fightback, when the visitors battled their way back into things at 17-7, but Jacob Rowan's try quickly snuffed out any hope of a comeback.

The second half very much became a matter of how many the final score would be, and even a couple of late scores for the Warriors didn't take the gloss off a very good win for the Cherry and Whites.

In terms of the league table, it keeps Gloucester within touching distance of fifth place and there is still a lot to play for. For now, it's a morale boost ahead of the two European Rugby Challenge Cup fixtures which will determine the team's progress in that competition.

Matchday loomed with conditions looking heavy underfoot. Frost earlier in the week had been followed by heavy rain on the Friday and the ground staff had worked wonders to produce such a playable surface.

But the ball was understandably tough to handle and Gloucester had an early chance as Worcester dropped the kick off and then carried over their own line after a crafty kick from Billy Twelvetrees. However, they were penalised at the five metre scrum and the opportunity was gone.

The Warriors couldn't exit their 22 though, and were subsequently penalised at a ruck as Gloucester applied the pressure. Greig Laidlaw stepped up and made it 3-0 with ease.

The Cherry and Whites continued to press. Burns pinned Worcester back with an intelligent kick, Laidlaw and Hibbard worked the blindside well but Jonny May was bundled into touch near in the corner.

Gloucester laid siege to the Worcester line, with the pick and go the order of the day. Worcester defended admirably around the fringes but, when the ball came wide, Jonny May picked up from the base of the ruck and darted his way over. Laidlaw converted for 10-0.

It was an excellent spell for Gloucester and they duly pressed home their advantage. Again the blindside was the area of weakness exploited, as Burns freed Jonny May and Matt Scott was on his shoulder to take the scoring pass. Laidlaw added a good conversion for 17-0.

The Warriors almost hit back immediately as Faosiliva hit a flat pass at pace and steamed into the Gloucester 22. However, the scramble defence got back and a knock-on averted the danger for the time being.

Worcester did have an opportunity to open their account on 27 minutes, but former Gloucester back Ryan Mills was off target after the Warriors won a penalty at a scrum and, shortly afterwards, they butchered a clear try-scoring chance as they failed to exploit a two on one and then knocked on just short of the line.

That said, it was a better period of play for the visitors and they were finally starting to spend some meaningful time in the Gloucester 22 and ask some questions.

And they finally got their reward on 32 minutes as Cooper Vuna picked up the ball in midfield, somehow wriggled his way out of a couple of tackles and crossed for an excellent solo try. Mills' conversion narrowed the gap to 17-7.

Gloucester hit straight back and calmed any nerves. Billy Burns fizzed the ball into midfield just outside the Worcester 22 where Jacob Rowan slipped a tackle and then showed good pace and strength to power over. Laidlaw was again on target with the conversion for 24-7.

There was then a moment of concern for the Cherry and Whites as Greig Laidlaw had to leave the action for a head injury assessment, Ben Vellacott replacing him to make his Aviva Premiership debut.

But that was the final incident of note before half time, so the Cherry and Whites went in with a decent 24-7 lead. It had been positive rugby in tricky conditions, but Worcester had produced enough dangerous line breaks to show that they weren't out of this yet.

Vellacott for Laidlaw became a permanent replacement at half-time, and the young debutant was quickly looking at home as he bossed his forwards about in the opening exchanges. But it was his half-back partner, Billy Burns, who extended the lead with a 45th minute penalty.

The game was starting to open up and Burns lifted the crowd with a thrilling break from his own 22, taking play deep into Worcester territory but passed left when the better option would have been to go right – it's easy from up in the stands!

But the bonus point try final came on the hour, and it was well and truly made in New Zealand! Tom Marshall dinked a kick over the top for Jeremy Thrush to gather and the big second row offloaded perfectly to the supporting John Afoa for the prop to romp home. Twelvetrees added the extras.

With the bonus point and the result in the bag, Gloucester relaxed and cut loose. Vellacott worked the short side after good driving work from the forwards and put Sharples over in the corner, Matt Scott then picked up an errant Worcester pass on his own 22 and ran it back all the way.

Worcester got a consolation as Tevita Cavubati pounced as Gloucester were guilty of being a tad overambitious and running the ball from their own 22, but Josh Hohneck promptly muscled his way over to bring up the half century.

The Warriors did manage to have the final word as Faosiliva dotted down with everyone standing still thinking there had been a knock-on.

It was scant consolation and the visitors head home to Sixways with Bristol breathing down their necks at the foot of the table.

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