

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, JANUARY 14, 2017

**IMPIANTO SPORTIVO LA GHIRADA – EUROPEAN RUGBY
CHALLENGE CUP**

**GLOUCESTER COMPLETE THE ITALIAN JOB WITH BONUS POINT
WIN IN TREVISO**

BENETTON RUGBY 0 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 41

It was a case of triumph over adversity for Gloucester in Italy this weekend, their pre-match preparations ruined by a relocation of the game. However, it was a job well done for the Cherry and Whites who defeated Benetton Treviso 41-0 in freezing conditions in Italy to top pool one.

It was a weekend when there were so many excuses ready at hand should things have not gone to plan. The plane was held at the airport before allowing the squad to disembark, the pitch was unfit to play at the Stade Comminale di Monigo, the game was played on a 4G pitch at Treviso's training ground.

But, in a demonstration of this team's growing confidence and maturity, the Gloucester Rugby squad shrugged off all of these potential speed bumps and delivered a professional performance, resulting in a 41-0 victory that takes them back to top of pool one in the European Rugby Challenge Cup with one round to play.

It was old school rugby in a way, supporters crowded around the pitch, just a few metres from the field of play. There was no scoreboard and the floodlights weren't great. But Gloucester didn't let this affect them.

They were backed by an amazing travelling support – hats off to those who travelled in the first place – let alone made their way to the secondary location before backing the side in fantastic fashion. They'll talk about this for years to come!

Even with a comfortable 17-0 half time lead and two tries already scored, there was pressure. As time ticked by and with the pitch visibly freezing, the sneaking suspicion grew that the referee might call time after 60 minutes when the result would stand.

So, to stay focused, complete the job in hand and secure a try scoring bonus point was a phenomenal effort and Gloucester know now that a bonus point win at home to Bayonne next weekend will secure the group and possibly a home quarter-final.

The build-up to the game was, to say the least, eventful. Upon arrival at the Stade Communale di Monigo, referee Thomas Charabas ruled that the playing surface was unplayable.

A period of confusion followed as officials determined the best play of action and, eventually, it was decided that the match would go ahead after a two hour delay at Benetton Treviso's training ground on a 4G surface.

The temperature started to drop markedly as game approached, and it was no surprise that there was plenty of kick tennis in the opening exchanges, interrupted only by Greig Laidlaw opening the scoring with an 8th minute penalty when Treviso were caught offside.

A frustrating period of play followed with both teams relying mostly on the boot. However, Ben Morgan lifted the spirits with a powerful run before Gloucester lost an attacking five metre lineout.

The first try wasn't far away though. Charlie Sharples counter attacked from a kick downfield, and made good ground before he linked up with Matt Scott and finally James Hook before the full-back skated over. Laidlaw converted for 0-10.

An overthrown Treviso lineout then almost led to the second try as Jacob Rowan gathered and accelerated brilliantly downfield. Billy Burns tried the cross-kick tactic and Jonny May seemed to have scored, but the officials ruled that James Hook had knocked on when competing for the ball in the air.

However, Gloucester stuck to their game plan and finally got their reward from the catch and drive as half time approached. The maul was well set and Richard Hibbard claimed the try. Laidlaw added another excellent conversion for 0-17.

That was it for the first half and the Cherry and Whites could reflect on a job reasonably well done with two tries already in the bag. It hadn't been spectacular stuff, but Gloucester had gone about their job in a professional manner. Now they needed to finish the job.

Things didn't look promising at the start of the second half. It wasn't good to watch; there were errors galore and Treviso managed to dominate possession without really threatening.

But credit to players and supporters alike, there was no sign of panic. They knew the chances would come and they were prepared to wait for them.

Try-machine Matt Scott duly delivered, cutting a great angle before breaking a tackle to score. The Scot provided the finish, but it came after a massive scrum from the Gloucester pack and an initial bullocking run from Ben Morgan. One more try would clinch the try scoring bonus point but the clock was ticking and the pitch was freezing.

And, at last, that crucial score game. The catch and drive again proved to be a potent weapon, and Man of the Match Richard Hibbard touched down. The Gloucester followers celebrated with gusto, they knew the significance of the score.

That obstacle overcome, Gloucester duly closed out the game. There was a touch of fortune with a wicked bounce as David Halaifonua scored the fifth, but the Tongan finished well and there was still time for Billy Twelvetrees to add a sixth with the final play of the game, a fine run from 35 metres out.

Freezing conditions, but Gloucester kept their cool ...