

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2017

KINGSHOLM – ANGLO WELSH CUP

**GLOUCESTER SLAY DRAGONS TO FINISH ANGLO-WELSH CUP
ON WINNING NOTE**

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 24 NEWPORT GWENT DRAGONS 13

There was only really pride at stake at Kingsholm on Saturday afternoon, but Gloucester went about their business in a professional manner defeating the Dragons by 24 points to 13 to round off the pool stages of the Anglo-Welsh Cup.

The victory sees Gloucester finish second in pool four of the Anglo-Welsh Cup but, on the day despite a good performance, the gloss was somewhat taken off things by a serious leg injury suffered by Elliott Creed in the final action of the game.

It saw proceedings end on a slightly subdued note for Gloucester after an efficient performance which saw them take four points from the final Anglo-Welsh Cup pool game of the season.

In truth, Kingsholm wasn't its usual raucous self throughout the whole game. Part of that can be attributed to the smaller than usual crowd on an international matchday, but a bigger reason was probably the lack of real try-scoring chances in the first half hour or so.

Despite Gloucester's best efforts, the game certainly took a while to come to life. The Cherry and Whites never really looked in too much trouble, but just couldn't quite find the key to unlock a dogged Dragons defence.

Once they did, the victory never really looked in doubt despite the odd moment of resistance from the Welsh region particularly in the latter stages.

So, Gloucester's unbeaten run is stretched to five matches and in terms of maintaining momentum ahead of the return to Aviva Premiership action at Leicester next weekend, it was job done.

On the day, the teams were greeted by blue skies and, although the playing surface was soft underfoot, the famed 'dome' had done its work and left the pitch playable.

Gloucester got some early joy out of the catch and drive, pushing the Dragons back with ease in and around the away 22. Joe Batley had a powerful run off the back of one such drive, and Mat Protheroe also came close but the defensive line held.

Both teams looked lively in the opening ten minutes, but scoring chances were few and far between. Another catch and drive from Gloucester entered the red zone but Cameron Orr knocked on in contact to end the threat.

The majority of the action was in and around the Dragons 22, with the Gloucester back row prominent with their ball carrying. However, the visitors' defence was proving to be a tough nut to crack.

Gloucester did nearly break the deadlock on 19 minutes. Dan Thomas snaffled scrum-half Charlie Davies' pass from the base of a scrum, set off downfield and was hauled down just a few metres short. He offloaded to Callum Braley who touched down, but the flanker had a foot in touch and the score was disallowed.

The visitors were now very much relying on a tactical kicking game, and it almost paid off on 23 minutes when, with decent field position after a jinking run from fly-half Jones, the number ten pushed a drop goal attempt just wide.

The Cherry and Whites then had to reshuffle as Samoan international hooker Motu Matu'u limped off to be replaced by Darren Dawidiuk.

And, somewhat against the run of play, the Dragons took the lead on 27 minutes as Gloucester were penalised for pulling back a man off the ball. Tom Prydie slotted the penalty from head on to the posts.

The Cherry and Whites were quickly back on the front foot and putting the Dragons under pressure, but another chance went begging when a catch and drive from a five metre line up was held up over the line.

By this stage, referee Rhys Thomas was beginning to test the patience of the home crowd as several debatable decisions went the way of the home side[*sic*] and helped them to escape from some tricky positions near their own line.

Finally, Gloucester's persistence paid off. Yet another catch and drive was well executed, eventually succeeding in shoving the visiting pack backwards and Cameron Orr claimed the try. Lloyd Evans added a superb touchline conversion.

That was the final kick of the half so the Cherry and Whites took a 7-3 lead into the break which they just about deserved. It had been a pretty stodgy affair to this point in all honesty, but Gloucester had just about shaded it.

And the Cherry and Whites came out positively again after the restart. A penalty award at scrum time allowed Lloyd Evans to take play into the Dragons 22, Gloucester laid siege to the visitors' goal-line before Henry Trinder picked a great line to crash over for a popular score. Evans converted for 14-3.

The home pack were certainly looking to get on top now, and won another minor tussle on 52 minutes as the Dragons popped up at a scrum, the penalty was awarded and Lloyd Evans duly made it 17-3.

But the visitors weren't done just yet. A series of penalty awards saw them march into the Gloucester 22, and the catch and drive resulted in a try for Matthew Screech to narrow the gap to 17-8. The tactic was nearly repeated a couple of minutes later but Gloucester just held out.

Both teams had made a number of changes by this point, but all the refereeing calls now seemed to be going the way of the visitors and the momentum had certainly turned with the game going into the final quarter.

It had been a tricky few minutes for Gloucester, but they came through it well and very nearly extended the lead on 66 minutes when Charlie Beckett was held up over the line after a period of sustained pressure.

However, Gloucester weren't to be denied, winning a penalty at the next scrum. Ben Vellacott took a quick tap and then showed good strength to make the line. Evans again converted from the touchline for 24-8.

That just about put the game to ice. However, the visitors were still determined to try and get something out of the game and, with former Gloucester scrum-half Tavis Knoyle pulling the strings, got some reward with a try out wide for Screech, his second of the game.

That was it for the scoring but, in a bid to try and secure a try scoring bonus point with no time left on the clock, Elliott Creed took on the Dragons defence from deep but went to ground awkwardly and in obvious distress.

Referee Thomas immediately brought an end to proceedings and a hush fell on Kingsholm as the young centre was stretchered off.

The thoughts and best wishes of everyone at the club are with him.

JC