

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2017

WELFORD ROAD – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**GLOUCESTER COME OFF SECOND BEST AS THE TIGERS
SHOW THEIR CLAWS**

LEICESTER TIGERS 34 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 9

Gloucester's long wait for a win at Welford Road goes on as their recent run of good form came to a shuddering halt on Saturday afternoon, a powerful first half performance laying the platform for a 34-9 Aviva Premiership victory.

It was a disappointing outcome as Gloucester had travelled to Welford Road hoping to build on a decent recent run of results and take a decisive step towards a spot in the top six of the Aviva Premiership table.

However, in what Director of Rugby David Humphreys described as 'the most disappointing performance of the season,' the Cherry and Whites found themselves on the back foot right from the off as they conceded an early try and struggled to get back on terms after that.

Credit to the Tigers. They've had their own issues recently but put them aside to secure a win that they badly needed themselves.

The home team pounced for two tries in the first half and had a third disallowed. But a key moment for Gloucester came just before half time when they created two great scoring chances but couldn't convert. Had they taken one, who knows how things would have panned out?

In hindsight though, Gloucester were second best in almost every area of the game and, although they dug deep and fought desperately to get back into the game, the Tigers struck twice late on to take a bonus point win.

It leaves Gloucester in eighth place in the table and desperately needing a result at home to Saracens to keep their top six hopes alive. Certainly no stone will go unturned this week in training as the squad and coaches look for answers.

It was a fast and furious start from the Tigers who swept into a deserved early lead. A smart inside pass saw Jack Roberts made the incisive break, the pack were in behind him and Luke Hamilton fought his way over from close range. Freddie Burns converted.

There was worse to come for the Cherry and Whites as, in the build-up to the score, Sione Kalamafoni was injured and had to be replaced by Matt Kvesic.

The Burns brothers then swapped penalties, Billy first followed by Freddie, as the game ebbed and flowed to leave Leicester leading 10-3 after 12 minutes. It was Freddie's last contribution, however, as he stayed down after making a tackle, and Owen Williams entered the fray.

Gloucester then had a chance to narrow the gap after excellent work at the breakdown by Matt Kvesic, but the long-range penalty effort by Billy Twelvetrees was narrowly off target.

The Cherry and Whites were then opened up by a chip over the top from Williams which took a wicked bounce away from the cover. It took play into the Gloucester 22 and only great defensive work denied Tom Brady in the corner.

It gave Leicester an attacking five metre scrum, though. The home pack had already shown their power at scrum time, and duly did so again, a penalty try the award. Williams converted for 17-3.

These were difficult moments for Gloucester and it could have been worse. Jono Kitto was denied an opportunist try on 32 minutes when the TMO spotted a block on Matt Kvesic. It was a tight call.

Gloucester had hardly thrown a punch in attack but then forced a five metre situation after a neat chip ahead by Henry Purdy. The first lineout was blatantly pulled down by the Tigers back row when seemingly headed for the line. The second saw Hohneck bundled into touch.

Two gilt-edged chances then went begging as Tom Savage went steaming through only to be hauled down just short of the line, before a three on two out wide was wasted.

And the Tigers promptly dished out a harsh lesson on taking chances, moving downfield efficiently and extending the lead with a drop goal from Owen Williams with no time left on the clock.

It had been a tough 40 minutes for Gloucester who had been on the back foot throughout. The home pack had established a powerful platform up front which had resulted in the Tigers playing on the front foot and taking the game to Gloucester.

On the other hand, the Cherry and Whites' moments of telling possession had been fleeting. There had been a couple of decent half-chances, but the execution had been lacking to let Leicester off the hook.

A much better second-half performance was going to be needed as the Tigers had their tails up and would be looking to put this one to bed quickly.

Gloucester did at least draw first blood, Billy Burns knocking over his second penalty of the afternoon on 42 minutes after Matt Smith conceded a needless penalty, and the fly-half narrowed the gap further on 54 minutes with his third to make it 20-9.

But Gloucester needed more than penalties and, even though it was a flat 20 minutes or so from the home side, they just couldn't find the key to unlock the Tigers defence.

So, the game drifted along until, just when it seemed as though there would be no further score, the Tigers finally produced a moment of quality in the second half, Adam Thompstone popping up in midfield to scythe through a gap and score. Williams converted for 27-9.

It sealed the game, and the icing on the cake came on the final whistle for the Tigers as a catch and drive resulted in the try scoring bonus point as Maxime Mermoz touched down. Williams converted to make the final score 34-9.

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