

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2017

RICOH ARENA – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**GLOUCESTER LEFT TO REGRET MISSED CHANCES IN DEFEAT
AT WASPS**

WASPS 35 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 22

Gloucester were competitive for long periods at the Ricoh Arena on Sunday afternoon, but were left to rue a host of missed scoring opportunities throughout as Wasps hit back to earn a 35-22 Aviva Premiership win.

It was one of those frustrating afternoons when the final score really didn't reflect the effort that Gloucester put in on the day. They fronted up superbly against a very strong Wasps side, one currently leading the Aviva Premiership, and deserved to come away with something.

The Cherry and Whites very much dominated the first half and could, and probably should have come away with more points. However, a number of trips into the Wasps 22 didn't result in points and the home team swooped for ten points in the four minutes before half time to take a 15-10 lead into the break.

Gloucester immediately fought their way back into things via a David Halaifonua try, only to concede almost straight away to give up the initiative. Great spirit then saw them battle their way back into the game at 25-22 to give themselves a fighting chance, but ill-discipline proved to be the Achilles heel and two late tries clinched the win for the home team.

It left Gloucester tasting disappointment again on the road. A fortnight ago, they were second best at Leicester and well beaten. Today they pushed Wasps all the way and came away with nothing. Both defeats hurt for different reasons.

It leaves Gloucester needing to bounce back in next Saturday's fixture at home to Harlequins to keep their top six hopes alive. A win is a must but a repeat of today's application, combined with some more precision in scoring positions, will go a long way to achieving that.

Gloucester started well on the day but were slightly fortunate when Willie Le Roux picked off a loose pass only for play to be called back for a penalty. Billy Twelvetrees went for the posts and had no problem opening the score after six minutes.

However, the Cherry and Whites then undid the good work by taking a quick 22 drop out and missing the follow up tackle. Wasps poured forward and, although Gloucester resisted the initial surge, Jimmy Gopperth was just able to squeeze in at the corner. It was a fine finish but the centre couldn't add the extras from the touchline.

Gloucester responded well after the setback, settling down and kicking well tactically to drive play into the Wasps half. No breakthrough was forthcoming but they were playing the game in the right areas of the pitch.

And the pressure paid off on 20 minutes. Ben Morgan powered off the base of a scrum in the Wasps 22 and was only halted a metre or so short of the Wasps line. Gloucester stayed patient, came close a couple of times through Savage and Scott, before moving the ball wide to Hook who glided over. Twelvetrees added a good conversion for 5-10.

The Cherry and Whites did their best to follow up with another score as Kurtley Beale mishandled a kick through. Jacob Rowan made a powerful run deep into the 22 and Wasps had to defend their line bravely. A penalty followed for offside but Twelvetrees hooked the kick wide of the left hand upright.

Wasps were slightly subdued as the half hour mark came and went, and so were the home crowd. It was time for the man with the mic to pipe up and utter an "Allez, allez, allez" to try and lift things.

It seemed to have the desired effect. Danny Cipriani made a darting run, Christian Wade and Willie Le Roux got involved and it all resulted in a 36th minute penalty from Gopperth to narrow the gap to 8-10.

Frustratingly, the tide seemed to have turned. A needless penalty given on halfway allowed Cipriani to drive play into the Gloucester 22. The catch and drive took a while to get going but eventually headed in the right direction and the unlikely figure of Gopperth touched down, before converting his own try.

It saw the home side go into half-time with a 15-10 lead having scored ten late points. It was a blow to Gloucester who had pretty much bossed the game to that point before being hit with the late double blow.

They had done most things right in that first half but had paid the price for not coming away with more points from their visits to the Wasps 22, and now faced an uphill challenge in the second half.

But Gloucester began well, taking full advantage of an overthrown Wasps lineout as Matt Scott pinned the home team back with a crafty grubber kick.

The resulting catch and drive looked good, and Richard Hibbard broke off to go close. Again Gloucester stayed patient in the red zone and fashioned to create an overlap for David Halaifonua on the left and the winger finished well to level the scores.

The parity was short-lived as Alex Rieder broke a tackle in midfield to open up the Cherry and Whites. Cipriani followed up with a measured grubber and, although Charlie Sharples halted Thomas Young, the offload inside found Willie Le Roux for the try. Gopperth converted from the touchline for 22-15.

Gopperth and Cipriani were starting to have an increasingly big role on the game, the former driving Gloucester back with some intelligent kicking, the latter freeing Ashley Johnson with some deft handling.

For all that, Gloucester almost worked their way back into the game but left the Wasps 22 without points yet again, and Wasps promptly showed them how to do it as Gopperth extended the lead to 25-15 with a 59th minute penalty.

With 10 minutes left to play, Gloucester thought they'd give themselves a glimmer of hope as Tom Marshall seemed to barge his way over from close range. It went to the TMO and Gloucester, confident in the outcome, retreated to their own half only for a knock-on to be awarded.

The clearance from the scrum, however, only found Tom Marshall. The full-back returned it with interest before finding Matt Scott who sprinted over for Gloucester's third. Twelvetrees converted for 25-22.

With just over seven minutes left to play, Gloucester were nicely set for a final push towards an impressive win. However, as they fought to regain possession, they were penalised for not rolling away and Wasps went to the corner.

As was the case in the first half, Wasps set up their catch and drive patiently and, once again, it was Jimmy Gopperth who hung on to the back of the maul and claimed the touchdown.

It took Gloucester out of losing bonus point range and the disappointment was palpable, even more so when Wasps pounced with the final play of the game to create a try for Christian Wade which really gave the final score an undeservedly lopsided feel.

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