

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, MARCH 4, 2017**

**KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**AGONY FOR GLOUCESTER AS LAST-MINUTE PENALTY  
SNATCHES WIN FOR QUINS**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 27 HARLEQUINS 30**

Gloucester looked to have this one in the bag with just seven minutes to go, but Harlequins pounced for two late tries and a late penalty to earn a 27-30 win in the Aviva Premiership at Kingsholm on Saturday.

It's a scenario that has played out time and again for Gloucester this season. Leading 27-15 and pushing hard for the fourth try, Gloucester looked to have Quins on the ropes.

However, the game took a decisive turn when Tim Visser knocked on with Gloucester in a promising position. Advantage was played but Gloucester got nothing from it. Quins moved downfield, Richard Hibbard was yellow-carded and the match unravelled from there on in.

With a glimmer of hope, Harlequins seized the day as the Chisholm brothers, Ross and James, both crossed to level the scores.

Gloucester tried to hit back and thought they had a decent chance to break clear after a Quins knock on. The crowd was screaming for advantage to be played but referee Garner called play back for a scrum. With Gloucester down to seven men, there was an inevitability to it, the Cherry and Whites were penalised and James Lang kicked the winning penalty.

It's a huge blow to Gloucester's top six ambitions. Mathematically, it's still possible, but a number of results would have to go Gloucester's way. Realistically, the path to Europe lies through Europe and the Challenge Cup quarter-final against Cardiff has massive importance.

The players and coaches would probably like to play again straightaway, to leap back on the horse. However, with the next two weekends without a game for the first team, it's a case of reflecting, moving on and preparing for Bristol away.

Things hurt badly right now, for players and supporters alike, but there are still games to play.

And everything had started so brightly for the Cherry and Whites. Gloucester got off to a flyer on the day and the score was an absolute cracker.

Turning the ball over on their own line, Gloucester went from deep. Matt Scott's long pass freed Billy Burns and then David Halaifonua. Willi Heinz took it on and was halted just a metre or so short, but Charlie Sharples was on hand to gather and score. Billy Burns had an easy conversion for 7-0.

The Cherry and Whites were looking lively, another attack from deep seeing Jacob Rowan make good ground downfield, linking well with David Halaifonua only for the ball to go forward as Gloucester tried to keep the ball alive.

Gloucester were feeling bold and turned down a reasonably straightforward kick at goal in favour of kicking for the corner, but couldn't press home the advantage and almost paid the price as Tim Visser and Joe Marchant inspired a break from deep. The scramble defence got back just in time.

Quins were working their way back into the game though, and duly got their reward on 22 minutes. Good hands moved the ball out wide, although there was a hint of a forward pass to Marland Yarde in midfield, and Tim Visser had the strength to force his way over in the corner.

And Quins silenced the home crowd on the half hour as they took the lead.

Gloucester turned the ball over in the Quins half, and a swift counter down the left saw Ross Chisholm put Charlie Mulchrone over. Tim Swiel converted for 7-12.

The home crowd felt there had been a forward pass in the build-up and were starting to get on referee Greg Garner's back, feeling that the Cherry and Whites weren't getting the rub of the green.

There were ironic cheers when Gloucester were finally awarded a kickable penalty and, although Billy Burns' non-kicking foot slipped, the ball bisected the posts for 10-12.

Quins were straight back on the front foot as Gloucester failed to gather the restart. The defence from the home side was good but, just as they seemed to have survived, they conceded a scrum penalty on their own put in and Swiel made no mistake for 10-15.

That was it for the scoring in the first half and both teams headed for the dressing room feeling that the game was well within their grasp. For the second week in a row, Gloucester would feel that they didn't make the most of their first half chances.

Quins, for their part, had weathered an early storm and were looking very dangerous with ball in hand and more than capable of capitalising on Gloucester errors. It was game on for the second half.

And the second period took a while to get going as both teams kicked for territory, the only real incident of note being Quins scrum-half, Charlie Mulchrone, having to leave the field injured.

Gloucester badly needed a break, and got one on 48 minutes when Mat Luamanu dropped a high kick. Jeremy Thrush hacked on and then nailed Luc Jones as he gathered near his own line. Gloucester won the ruck, stayed calm and Matt Scott's pass allowed David Halaifonua to jog over. Burns added an excellent conversion for 17-15.

And the third followed almost immediately. A powerful maul moved play upfield before Richard Hibbard broke off. The hooker offloaded brilliantly out of the tackle to Jacob Rowan and the flanker sent Charlie Sharples sprinting home for his second. Burns converted for 24-15.

Burns then extended the lead with a 56th minute penalty after David Halaifonua flattened Tim Visser, Quins conceding a penalty at the ruck. And the visitors missed an immediate chance to respond in kind when Swiel's attempted penalty drifted wide in the wind.

And Quins were then denied a try after James Chisholm's break caught Gloucester napping at a ruck. Willi Heinz dragged him down and the flanker's offload, which put Luamanu under the posts was ruled forward by the TMO.

Having dodged a couple of bullets, Gloucester poured forward looking for the try scoring bonus point. Hibbard and Halaifonua both came close, but Quins dug deep to keep their line intact.

Momentum then swung massively the way of the visitors as Tim Visser gambled by knocking on in his own 22. Referee Garner played advantage and nothing came of it for Gloucester. We didn't know it at the time but the tide had turned.

Quins moved downfield and Richard Hibbard was yellow carded for playing the ball on the ground. Several phases later, James Chisholm broke a tackle and scored. Lang converted for 27-22.

Tension now enveloped the ground. Quins had nothing to lose and, to their credit, stretched Gloucester left and right, the home side unable to slow down the visitors' slick offloading game.

And it came as no surprise when an attack from deep resulted in Ross Chisholm levelling the scores. Lang's conversion held up in the win to leave it at 27-27 but there was worse to come for Gloucester.

Quins knocked on and Gloucester looked to counter. However, the scrum was awarded and that wasn't what Gloucester wanted. Down a man, they were duly penalised and Lang held his nerve to bisect the posts and secure the win.

JC