

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, APRIL 7, 2017

KINGSTON PARK – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

GLOUCESTER SUFFER LAST-GASP HEARTBREAK AWAY
AT NEWCASTLE FALCONS

NEWCASTLE FALCONS 16 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 14

Gloucester gave it everything at Kingston Park on Friday evening but were denied a deserved victory when they were penalised at a set scrum with no time left on the clock and Joel Hodgson kicked the penalty to snatch a 16-14 win for the home side.

It's been a season when defeat has been snatched from the jaws of victory so often, but this one was a cruel one by any standards.

The Cherry and Whites overcame the pre-match loss of Ross Moriarty, a crippling penalty count, a number of other injuries and having to play the last ten minutes with only 14 men after a harsh yellow card.

Despite all that, Gloucester looked as though they'd done enough to earn a memorable win at a venue which is always difficult to play at. But, with no time left to play, Gloucester were penalised on their put in and Joel Hodgson kicked the vital penalty.

The outcome leaves Gloucester still just ahead of the Falcons in the league table, but that's scant consolation right now. The long bus ride home will seem even longer for the squad as they ponder what might have been.

And it could have been so different. Gloucester created any number of chances in attack, defended bravely throughout and adapted well when they had to reshuffle their ranks because of injury.

The yellow card to Evans seemed harsh as the young fly-half looked to have won the ball in the air. The final penalty was puzzling as the scrum seemed to wheel and why would Gloucester do that with no time left on the clock and the Cherry and Whites clinging to the lead.

But, sadly, it's a case of close but no cigar tonight and Gloucester will have to channel any frustrations into a performance at home to Sale next Saturday.

Gloucester looked very sharp in the early exchanges on the night, Jacob Rowan and Willi Heinz both making good breaks while a Henry Trinder grubber for Jonny May to chase was just too long and ran dead.

However, it was the home side who almost took an 11th minute lead though a Mike Delany penalty when Motu Matu'u was harshly adjudged for have tackled Micky Young late, only for the kick to hit the upright and stay out.

However, the ball bounced kindly for the Falcons which piled the pressure onto Gloucester. Another penalty conceded saw the ball kicked to the corner, but the Newcastle lineout throw wasn't straight and Gloucester were able to clear.

The home team were getting the benefit of the 50-50 decisions at this stage, and another penalty conceded saw Newcastle go for the corner again.

Gloucester held the initial surge but, despite some brave defence, couldn't stop Juan Pablo Socino from powering over from close range. Mike Delany converted for 7-0 after 22 minutes.

Gloucester almost struck back immediately after a midfield line break from Mark Atkinson, but his grubber forward, intended for Charlie Sharples, bounced off Alex Tait to safety and the chance was gone.

The Cherry and Whites then had to withstand some more pressure before a gliding break from Henry Trinder was halted near the line by a high tackle by Alex Tait. There were appeals for a penalty try, but only a penalty was awarded.

The kick went to the corner and Gloucester were held out. However, they stayed patient and moved the ball out left, where Jonny May showed great feet to score. Twelvetrees knocked over a superb conversion to level the scores. 7-7 at half time.

It was a morale boosting score for the Cherry and Whites who had spent most of the first half on the back foot, largely due to Newcastle getting excellent possession and territory through the penalty count.

Gloucester though had oozed menace when they did have the ball, and had certainly made more line breaks. The conversion rate to this point hadn't been as good as last week against Cardiff but the chances were being created which was a positive.

Atkinson, who had enjoyed a useful first half, was also prominent at the start of the second as Gloucester moved quickly into the home 22, only for a knock-on to kill the momentum.

And it was the home team who nudged their way back into lead as indiscipline continued to haunt Gloucester, replacement fly-half Joel Hodgson knocking over a 47th minute penalty.

Crucially, Gloucester hit back immediately. Jonny May made the incisive break off a neat inside pass from Twelvetrees, before quickly recycled ball found Tom Marshall who grubbered ahead and won the chase against Ally Hogg to touch down. Twelvetrees converted for 10-14.

The next few minutes were an arm wrestle with neither side really able to gain the upper hand, but Gloucester suffered a double injury blow on the hour as Willi Heinz and Henry Purdy both limped off.

Gloucester badly needed another score, but it was the home team who got back to within a point on 66 minutes when Hodgson slotted his second penalty of the night after a ruck offence.

Nerves were jangling and Gloucester thought they'd scored a crucial second when Ludlow broke and found Tom Denton who juggled before offloading to Marshall who dotted down. But the TMO ruled that the ball had gone forward and the score was ruled out.

And the Cherry and Whites were then dealt a further blow as Lloyd Evans, after a sublime chip and gather, was yellow carded as he competed in the air with Joel Hodgson for his second chip, referee Luke Pearce seeing a high tackle.

Gloucester were now up against it, but coped incredibly well with anything the Falcons could throw at them. When an attack with less than a minute to go resulted in a knock-on, they looked home and hosed. It had been a manful effort.

However, then came the fateful blast of referee Pearce's whistle and everything changed ...

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