

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2017**

**KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**DRAMA AT KINGSHOLM AS LAST-MINUTE WOODWARD TRY  
SNATCHES WIN FOR GLOUCESTER**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 28 EXETER CHIEFS 21**

Gloucester and Exeter battled out a thrilling Aviva Premiership opener at Kingsholm on Friday evening, Jason Woodward's last gasp try securing a 28-21 win for the Cherry and Whites.

It was a game where all three outcomes were possible until the very last whistle. A dogged second-half performance from Gloucester looked set to earn them the win, but Chiefs drew level and Henry Slade missed a chance to earn a late lead.

But then came the incredible last minute. Gloucester threw everything at the visitors in a bid to snatch a late win. The Chiefs were disciplined and looked set to hold out, but Billy Twelvetrees showed a moment of class as the ball ran loose to find Jason Woodward and the full-back crashed over to send Kingsholm into raptures.

In truth, defeat was perhaps harsh on Exeter. They'd taken the game to Gloucester for long periods and survived a sin-binning. Champions that they are, they'd battled back from a 14-21 deficit in the second half and looked the more likely winners in the final ten minutes.

But Gloucester, playing in the Premiership under Johan Ackermann for the first time, weren't to be denied. Roared on by an ecstatic home crowd, the men in Cherry and White were swept forward on a wave of partisan and vocal support.

A bonus point win is an ideal start for Gloucester, but the challenge now of course is to back it up. That's been an issue for the Cherry and Whites in recent years. However, although it's early days, there seems to be real togetherness in this group.

Gloucester's defence was given a tough examination in the opening minutes as Exeter dominated possession, recycling the ball efficiently, working the phases, looking for an opening.

They looked to have survived the initial onslaught, clearing downfield before Billy Burns tried a cheeky chip over the top. It could have bounced either way, but Max Bodilly gathered and launched a counter attack which finished with Sam Simmons crossing after fine interplay involving Dollman and Slade. Gareth Steenson converted from out wide.

The Chiefs continued to dominate possession as Gloucester struggled to get out of their own half, the visitors playing with the confidence that comes from being champions; the Cherry and Whites restricted to defensive duties at this point and a Jeremy Thrush steal at an Exeter 5 metre lineout was crucial.

The Cherry and Whites then so very nearly struck from deep, turnover ball and slick hands giving Jason Woodward the chance to break down the 5 metre channel. He chipped over the top and re-gathered but didn't see Willi Heinz sprinting up inside him and the chance was gone.

Gloucester were working their way steadily into this game, but were twice called for holding on in the tackle in Exeter territory, much to the ire of the Kingsholm faithful. The first chorus of "You don't know what you're doing..." was promptly heard.

But, on 24 minutes, Gloucester finally got some reward for their efforts. Mark Atkinson made the initial midfield break, with Andy Symons in support. The cover got back, but Gloucester stayed patient and Jeremy Thrush muscled his way over from close range. Burns converted to level the scores.

Parity was short-lived. A high tackle allowed Exeter to move play into the Gloucester half. Big runners slammed into the Gloucester defensive line, but it was a bad missed tackle on Sam Simmons which allowed the number eight to break through and score near the posts. The conversion for Steenson was a formality.

Gloucester badly needed the next score, and had a chance on 33 minutes but Burns was off target from a penalty, head on to the posts, that he would ordinarily back himself to slot.

A subsequent penalty was then kicked to the corner and, after several phases of patient build-up play, it was that man Thrush again, just about making the line. A lengthy TMO referral followed, but Gloucester got the call and Burns' conversion made the half-time score 14-14.

It was a promising first 40 for Gloucester who had given as good as they'd got against the champions. They'd be disappointed at conceding the second try so soon after drawing level, but reasonably happy with the chances they'd created.

There was early drama at the start of the second half as Jason Woodward was taken out in the air when collecting his own up and under. Gareth Steenson was the culprit and duly yellow carded by referee Carley. The atmosphere, already fizzing, went up a notch.

It was a key moment, and Gloucester applied the squeeze, Henry Purdy tackled into touch at the corner as Exeter scrambled across in desperation. There were other half chances, but the Chiefs survived and Steenson returned to the fray without damage to the score-line.

But, restored to 15 men, the Chiefs' defence was finally breeched. There was an element of fortune as a Gloucester offload bounced forward off an Exeter leg, but Ben Morgan reacted quickest and pounced on the loose ball to score. Another TMO referral, but it went Gloucester's way and Burns added his third conversion for a 21-14 lead.

Predictably, the Chiefs were straight back on the front foot, stretching Gloucester left and right, scrum-half Nic White probing for an opening. But the Cherry and Whites put their bodies on the line.

But, as the game neared its final ten minutes, Gloucester were pegged back in heart-breaking fashion. Willi Heinz looked set to clear, but was grabbed just as he kicked. The ball looped up and Olly Woodburn and Ollie Thorley competed for it before Woodman ripped it out gleefully to score. Henry Slade added a superb touchline conversion.

It was a kick in the teeth, and the game could easily have slipped away as the Chiefs sensed an opportunity to purloin the points. Indeed, had Slade not missed an eminently kickable penalty, they could have done so.

But, cometh the hour, cometh the man. Speaking afterwards, Jason Woodward felt he'd had an ordinary first half. Gloucester fans will have forgotten all about that – marking your debut with a last-minute winning try against the champions tends to do that.

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