

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2017

WELFORD ROAD – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**TIGERS FIRST HALF BLITZ PROVES TOO MUCH FOR GLOUCESTER
AT WELFORD ROAD**

LEICESTER TIGERS 24 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 10

Gloucester left themselves with simply too much to do at Welford Road after a wretched first quarter and, despite a much improved second half, couldn't claw their way back into the game, the Leicester Tigers running out winners by 24 points to 10.

Three tries in the first 20 minutes almost ended this as a contest, and Gloucester had to show incredible resilience to prevent the Tigers from running away with the game. In fact, once they had gained a foothold in the match, Gloucester were more than competitive.

The analysis will show that there were simply too many errors and too much indiscipline in that first key period. But Gloucester showed, particularly in the second half that they are more than capable of competing at this level.

But the Cherry and Whites will regret some missed chances in that first half which, if taken, could have given the game a totally different complexion. The same applied in the second 40 minutes when several visits to the Tigers 22 resulted in no points gained.

Looking for positives, the team spirit and togetherness to dig deep was visible. The set piece was solid and Gloucester arguably didn't get the rewards at scrum time that they deserved.

Areas to improve? Discipline, decision making and execution in attack. But Gloucester are at least creating chances – sooner or later it will click.

But, at the end of the day, it's another fruitless trip to Welford Road and Gloucester now face a short turnaround before next Friday's home game against Worcester Warriors at Kingsholm, a game which is incredibly important and not just because of local bragging rights being at stake.

Gloucester had to make one late change from the one announced on Friday. Billy Burns failed a late fitness test so former Tiger Billy Twelvetrees moved to fly-half and Henry Trinder came into the starting line-up in the Gloucester midfield.

In near perfect conditions at Welford Road, both teams started positively, looking to put width on the ball but, in the early stages, the tackling was up to the challenge. Jonny May had one early kick to chase, but the touchline came to Gloucester's aid.

The first ten minutes were dominated by the home team though in terms of possession and territory and the pressure finally told. Gloucester were penalised for not rolling away in the shadow of their posts then caught napping by Ben Youngs' quick tap, the scrum-half just making the line. George Ford converted.

The Cherry and Whites very nearly hit back immediately with Matu'u and Scott carrying well, but the ball was lost as play neared the Leicester line and the chance was lost.

Indiscipline and handling errors subsequently allowed the Tigers to move easily downfield and, following a five metre lineout, Youngs showed great awareness to dart down the blindside and touch down in the corner. Ford converted from the touchline.

Sione Kalamafoni had looked to be obstructing Ruan Ackermann as Youngs touched down, but the try stood and the decisions continued to go the way of the Tigers with the length of advantage being played differing wildly from team to team.

But, for a team without a win this season, the Tigers were flying.

And the third try followed on 21 minutes, Telusa Veainu making a scything outside break before Nick Malouf fought his way over to score. Ford once again converted.

Henry Trinder briefly lifted Gloucester spirits with a nice midfield break, before Ludlow and Thorley moved menacingly down the left, but the ball was once again agonisingly lost near the Leicester line.

Another turnover in Leicester territory then lead to a Tigers breakaway, Jonny May popping up more than once, and another advantage which seemed to last an infinity gave the home team a chance to go for the corner only to botch the lineout.

As the first half drew to a close, Gloucester tried in vain to get something going. Half breaks were made down the left and the right but, on both occasions, the Tigers defence snuffed out the danger.

It had been a deeply frustrating first half for Gloucester, much the same story as last week at Quins with errors and indiscipline making life easy for their hosts. There had been the odd spark of life in attack, but they hadn't been converted into points.

All the intangibles were also going the way of the home side, including the majority of the refereeing decisions and it was going to be a tall order to get back into this in the second half.

But the Cherry and Whites did at least come out firing some shots, taking play into the home 22 with some powerful ball carrying before Josh Hohneck crashed over from close range, Billy Twelvetrees adding the extras.

Trinder was lost to a blood injury before Jason Woodward did his best to inspire the Cherry and Whites with one superb break before chasing his own kick ahead and claiming majestically. Twelvetrees added a penalty to narrow the gap to 21-10.

Gloucester then got the benefit of a couple of decisions which had the home crowd baying for blood, and it took some good work in defence to keep the line intact in the face of some intense pressure.

Gloucester were certainly fighting hard, and there was the occasional long-range break but no reward for the Cherry and Whites who went further behind on 64 minutes when George Ford slotted a penalty awarded for offside.

There were more forays into the Tigers 22 as time ebbed away but, too often, the passing wasn't crisp enough, the ball hit the deck and the home team swooped to clear.

To their credit, Gloucester kept trying to play but were victims of their own ambition with just two minutes to play, a long throw-in to Ackermann seeing the back-row forced over his own goal-line.

Gloucester splintered the home scrum but didn't get the decision, and it took a massive effort to deny the Tigers from a five metre line-out.

Even then Gloucester did their utmost to secure at least a losing bonus point. Thorley, Sharples and Vellacott all made good ground into the Tigers half but, as the story of the day continued, the final pass wouldn't quite stick and the home team prevailed 24-10.

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