

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2017

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

GLOUCESTER JUST WITHSTAND WORCESTER FIGHTBACK
TO CLINCH TENSE VICTORY

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 24 WORCESTER WARRIORS 19

Gloucester seemed to have this one in the bag when 24-6 up, but a crazy final quarter saw Worcester come back into the game and only sterling defence kept the visitors at bay as the Cherry and Whites hung on for a 24-19 win.

When they led 17-0 and 24-6, Gloucester seemed to have this one in the bag and looked set for a comfortable bonus point victory. However, rugby's a funny old game at times and things took an unexpected turn in the final quarter.

Worcester, seemingly out of ideas on the attacking front, suddenly scored two tries and a Ryan Mills penalty got them to within five points. Gloucester were now down to 14 men as a grey area in the laws saw them unable to replace Tom Savage and it was backs-to-the-wall time.

Savage had clearly taken a blow to the head and, thankfully, recovered enough to leave the field under his own steam, referee Wayne Barnes ruling it a full injury and not sending him off for an HIA. Had it been the latter, Ed Slater could have returned.

As it was, the remaining 14 men had to dig deep and just held out to clinch a win in a game that they would probably have lost 12 months ago.

The real shame is that people may forget about some of the sparking rugby that Gloucester played earlier in the game.

Three superb tries were scored as the Cherry and Whites showed what they can do when on the front foot.

But, when all is said and done, a win's a win and Gloucester move temporarily up to seventh place in the table. More of the sublime attacking play and less of the stress would be appreciated by all Gloucester followers next week.

The opening few minutes were ominous and error-strewn for the visitors, with the ball hitting the deck on a number of occasions. One early break from Jason Woodward hinted at positive things for Gloucester.

And the full-back was heavily involved in the build-up to Donnacha O'Callaghan being sin-binned on six minutes, chipping nicely down the left flank to pile on the pressure. Willi Heinz took a quick tap as the Warriors were offside and O'Callaghan saw yellow for not retreating.

The visitors held firm as Gloucester went to the corner but couldn't clear their lines, and were subsequently penalised; Billy Burns on target with the penalty from the 10 metre line to open the scoring.

And the lead was very quickly extended. Gloucester attacked down the blindside and quick hands put Jason Woodward into space. The full-back didn't have much room to work in but offloaded superbly out of the back door to put Ollie Thorley over. Burns converted for 10-0.

A second so nearly followed as Billy Burns' grubber, after a slick break from Willi Heinz, forced Bryce Heem to turn but the winger just got back ahead of Thorley.

It was a brief respite as Gloucester countered off the 22 drop out. Billy Twelvetrees made the incisive break, and slick hands outflanked the Worcester defence to put Thorley flying clear for his second. Burns added the extras for 17-0.

It had been a grim opening for the visitors, but they were thrown a lifeline on 26 minutes as Gloucester closed the gap at a lineout in their own 22. The Cherry and Whites defence held, but at the expense of a penalty, and Ryan Mills had an easy task narrowing the gap to 17-3.

Worcester were enjoying more possession and territory at this point, the Gloucester lineout misfiring on occasion, and Mills was on target with a second penalty just before half-time to make it 17-6.

It had been a frustrating second quarter for the Cherry and Whites, but they went into the break with a decent 17-6 lead for which they were good value. However, they would certainly be looking to regain the initiative after the resumption.

Henry Trinder replaced Mark Atkinson at half-time and made an immediate impact as Gloucester attacked from the restart. The centre dummied his way clear from his own 22, then threw another before linking with Willi Heinz who returned the pass for Trinder to put Billy Twelvetrees under the posts for a stunning score. Burns converted for 24-6.

Hardly anyone would have believed at this point that this would be the final Gloucester score, such had been their cutting edge but drama was set to follow.

The Warriors responded with a decent spell of pressure, seemingly getting away with a couple of knock-ons in the build-up. Jeremy Thrush produced one great lineout steal and stern goal-line defence earned an important penalty as Worcester threatened.

However, the Warriors did strike as the hour mark approached, concerted pressure in the Gloucester 22 softening up the defence before Ryan Mills hoisted a cross-kick for Perry Humphreys to catch and score.

It was all seemingly about the bonus point try now for Gloucester, and there were a couple of decent chances but the scoring pass remained elusive as time ticked away. Credit has to go to the visitors though for continuing to work hard in defence.

And Worcester then put the cat amongst the pigeons as a neat backs move split the defensive line apart. Willi Heinz made a great cover tackle, but Gloucester couldn't slow the ball down and Humphreys crossed for his second.

There was a nervous buzz around the ground, but it quickly turned to one of concern as Tom Savage carried into contact and his head seemed to collide with the hip of one of the Worcester pack. Thankfully, Savage was able to walk off unaided.

But the nerves returned again on 75 minutes as Gloucester were penalised for holding on as they ran the ball out of defence and Mills had an easy penalty for 24-19.

Nails were being bitten all around the stadium and a seven-man Gloucester pack did amazingly well to stand firm at scrum time as Worcester sensed a real opportunity.

And it went to the wire. A penalty conceded allowed Ryan Mills to kick the visitors into a prime scoring position and the Kingsholm faithful would have been forgiven for imagining that the unthinkable was about to happen.

However, within metres of the Gloucester line, a Worcester knock-on ended the threat and the sense of relief was palpable.