

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2017

KINGSHOLM – EUROPEAN RUGBY CHALLENGE CUP

**GLOUCESTER DEFY TRICKY CONDITIONS TO EASE TO IMPRESSIVE
EUROPEAN WIN OVER AGEN**

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 61 AGEN 16

A pretty damp and dismal evening weather-wise at Kingsholm, but Gloucester gave the home faithful plenty to shout about on Thursday as they ran in nine tries on their way to a 61-16 European Rugby Challenge Cup victory over Agen.

After defeat in Pau last weekend, the victory gets Gloucester's European Rugby Challenge Cup campaign off and running with the double-header against Zebre in December next up.

And, despite the challenges posed by the wind and rain on the night, the win was achieved easily enough on the evening against an inexperienced looking Agen side.

Gloucester effectively had the game in the bag by half time, the try scoring bonus point already achieved, and they continued to press home their advantage in the second half.

The Cherry and Whites have been accused of not being ruthless enough at times, of not putting teams away when they're there for the taking. However, this evening, Gloucester finished off the job in style.

The performance was very much based on dominance up front, the scrum in particular was a real area for strength for Gloucester. And the backs made the most of the surfeit of possession, handling the greasy ball with aplomb.

Agen battled bravely, but they were basically outgunned in all areas and it was to their credit that they kept on battling and scored a deserved try in the final ten minutes as they kept plugging away.

But overall, it was Gloucester's night and they'll head into next weekend's Aviva Premiership game at Bath in good heart.

The weather throughout the day had been pretty awful and, as the game kicked off, rain was still falling steadily. Conditions were going to be testing, it appeared. However, Ben Vellacott made light of the slippery surface to open the scoring after only five minutes.

A catch and drive got Gloucester into the red zone before Ben Morgan broke off and found Vellacott. The scrum-half stepped past his man before tip-toeing down the touchline to score a great try. Billy Burns added an excellent conversion from wide out for a 7-0 lead.

Out of nowhere, the incessant rain had suddenly ceased and Gloucester continued to try and put width on the game. However, the next scoring chance went to the visitors as scrum-half Hugo Verdu attempted a penalty from well inside his own half, and the kick just about scraped home.

Gloucester were quickly back on the front foot though as Agen knocked on in their own 22. Henry Purdy came close but it was a beautiful flat pass from Billy Burns, cutting out the last defender, that gave Henry Trinder an easy finish. Burns' conversion made it 14-3.

The third try followed soon afterwards. Purdy was nearly though after a slick backs move but, once again, it was the catch and drive that paved the way, Ben Morgan powering his way over from close range.

Burns added another excellent conversion, but Agen rallied, forcing two more kickable penalty chances for Verdu who made no mistake with either to narrow the gap to 21-9 on the half hour.

The only area of irritation at this point for Gloucester was the penalty count. They weren't under any pressure at all; it was more a case of over-exuberance that was hurting them at this point.

The rain had returned at this point, swirling in the glare of the floodlights, and it was an appropriate switch to patient, possession rugby that secured the bonus point. Multiple phases softened up the defence, before Tom Savage powered over from close range with Burns adding his fourth conversion.

28-9 the half-time score and Gloucester were very good value for it. At this stage, only their own lapses in concentration seemed to be preventing them from running riot with the visitors having to make do with scraps of possession.

The try scoring bonus point was in the bag – how ruthless could Gloucester be in the second half?

The initial signs were promising as another catch and drive gave the backs chance to show off their handling, but David Halaifonua was denied a try as he put a foot in touch diving for the corner.

But Halaifonua promptly turned creator, smashing his way through in midfield before maintaining his composure to draw the final man and put Henry Purdy under the posts. Burns had a straightforward conversion for 35-9.

Try six swiftly followed, Burns threading through a sublimely weighted grubber for Henry Purdy whose inside pass put Owen Williams over untouched. Another easy conversion for Burns resulted.

Josh Hohneck was making yards for fun with ball in hand in the loose, and featured in the build-up to the next score as he offloaded sweetly to David Halaifonua. The winger muscled his way forward, but his inside pass was batted down into the in-goal area only for Ben Vellacott to pounce and touch down for his second of the night.

Brute forward power led to the next score, Agen reduced to 14 men as they lost prop Chabeaudie for a repeated scrum infringement. Gloucester already had the edge up front and Richard Hibbard took full advantage as he powered over from close range, Williams converting and taking the score to 54-9.

Agen did get some consolation in a try of their own as the game went into the final 10 minutes. It wasn't a beauty, a loose Gloucester pass hacked on by Branden Holder who touched down to score. Jeremy Russell converted with ease.

There was still time for Jake Polledri to finish things off as he scored his first try for the club to add the finishing touches to the 61-16 win.

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