

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2017

RECREATION GROUND – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

WILLIAMS KEEPS HIS COOL TO KICK LAST GASP CONVERSION
AND EARN WIN AT BATH

BATH RUGBY 21 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 22

Gloucester upset the form book at the Rec on Sunday afternoon, Ed Slater's last-minute try followed by Owen Williams' nerveless conversion securing a 21-22 win for the Cherry and Whites over local rivals Bath.

Williams kept his cool to snatch a win for the Cherry and Whites, converting Ed Slater's last-gasp try just as it looked as though Semesa Rokodoguni's 75th minute would earn the West Country bragging rights for Bath.

But Gloucester kept their composure, taking advantage of a Bath misdemeanour to take play into the Bath 22 as time expired. Bath defended their line bravely and it seemed as though the blue, black and white line would hold.

But Slater drove for the line from a metre out and Gloucester celebrated. However, grounding wasn't clear and the TMO was called into play. It was a 50/50 call and, thankfully it went Gloucester's way.

Even then, after the lengthy adjudication, Owen Williams faced a tricky conversion to win it. Johan Ackermann joked after the game that he'd seen Owen miss a similar effort in warm ups. The Welshman was the man for the job and bisected the uprights for the win.

It clinched Gloucester's first away win of the season and only their second win in 11 Aviva Premiership encounters with Bath.

More importantly, it's a huge boost for morale going into the next phase of the season, the Anglo-Welsh Cup.

And it was well deserved, superb defence soaking up what the home side could throw at them, before responding well to adversity when they went behind late on. The key now is to build on this.

After a cagey opening, with neither team willing to make any sort of error, Gloucester stunned the home crowd with a well-worked fifth minute try.

The Cherry and Whites exploited the blindside, Henry Trinder making good ground and also unleashing some slick sleight of hand before finding Willi Heinz in support. The skipper then used the supporting Trinder as a decoy and dummied his way clear for a great score and a 0-5 lead.

Trinder was at it again shortly afterwards, taking a flat pass off clean lineout ball to burst clear before showing great strength to stay on his feet and into the Bath 22, only for the ball to be lost forward after the clear out.

And the home team duly punished Gloucester with a fine long range try. Jonathan Joseph shrugged off a tackle to make the key break, Anthony Watson took it on and found Semesa Rokodoguni with the try-scoring pass to level the scores. A reminder of the potency of the Bath backs.

A good spell of pressure followed as Bath stretched the Gloucester defence left and right. The tackling was solid but, eventually, a penalty was conceded for not releasing the tackled player and Rhys Priestland's penalty nudged his team in front 8-5 after 26 minutes.

A harsh call for crossing as Willi Heinz broke clear then allowed Priestland to drive play into the Gloucester 22 and apply the pressure again, but Ed Slater produced a superb bit of work at a ruck to win the penalty and avert the danger.

However, Bath were almost able to extend their lead on 34 minutes. David Halaifonua delivered a punishing hit on Anthony Watson, but didn't roll away from the tackle area. Watson was helped off for an HIA, while Priestland missed the long-range penalty.

The Cherry and Whites responded with some promising build-up play, only to be penalised for holding on, and it was Bath who finished the first half on the front foot, probing in and around the Gloucester 22 but without any reward.

It was an intriguing encounter. Without doubt, Bath had dominated the possession and territory but Gloucester's defence had been superb. But for the one missed tackle, the line would have gone un-breached.

All the intangibles had also gone the way of the home side – every loose ball found a Bath hand, blocked grubbers rolled their way, etc. Surely the tide would turn and hopefully Gloucester could take advantage.

The Cherry and Whites were quickly back on terms. Matt Banahan tried to stop a penalty kick going into touch near the corner but only succeeded in tapping the ball dead. Gloucester had a five metre scrum but had to settle for an Owen Williams penalty after the Bath backs were caught offside.

Gloucester then lost the influential Trinder to an HIA after a high shot and possible swinging arm from Charlie Ewels, and promptly fell behind as Priestland added his second penalty of the afternoon.

But the Cherry and Whites hit back and in some style. After a good spell of ball retention, John Afoa caught Bath napping at a ruck on their own 22, made some key yards and then offloaded superbly for Willi Heinz to scamper home for his second. Owen Williams converted for 11-15.

Priestland had a chance to narrow the gap but dragged a very kickable penalty wide of the left hand upright, and Trinder returned as the game went into the final quarter.

But the Bath fly-half was on target after 65 minutes as Gloucester were penalised for a high tackle.

14-15 going into the final 13 minutes and a time for cool heads, game management and a bit of luck with the refereeing decisions.

And cometh the hour, cometh one of Bath's big names. Taulupe Faetau made a midfield break and powered downfield, Matt Garvey took it on before the ball was moved right for Rokodoguni to glide over for his second. Priestland converted for 21-15.

Gloucester had fewer than five minutes to respond and didn't start well as they got in front of the kicker at the restart.

But they regained possession, laid siege to the Bath line and finally, finally got their reward to send the travelling supporters into ecstasy.

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