

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2017

KINGSHOLM – ANGLO-WELSH CUP

**GLOUCESTER SHAKE OFF THE RUST TO CLINCH IMPRESSIVE
ANGLO-WELSH WIN OVER IRISH**

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 47 LONDON IRISH 7

It took a much-changed Gloucester line-up a while to get going on Saturday afternoon but, once they hit their stride, they eased to a 47-7 Anglo-Welsh victory over a spirited London Irish side.

It's a win that keeps the Cherry and Whites in the hunt in pool one of the Anglo-Welsh Cup – level on points with Wasps and two points behind Bath as the competition moves on to the back burner before its resumption in the New Year.

But, equally as important as the result today was preparation for the visit of Saracens to Kingsholm in the Aviva Premiership next Friday evening. A number of first teamers were returning today and it was important today that they got battle-ready as well as avoiding injury.

And there was a certain amount of rustiness about Gloucester in the first half as the team struggled a little to find its way. But the third try just before half time was key and took the pressure off the second 40 minutes somewhat.

Even then, it took until the 58th minute to secure the try scoring bonus point as a dogged effort from the visitors threatened to frustrate the Cherry and Whites. But the final quarter saw Gloucester cut loose and ease to a morale-boosting victory.

Perhaps most pleasing as the game progressed was the role played by the club's younger players – Jake Polledri was immense throughout and Lloyd Evans played a nice little cameo in the final half hour.

Friday will see Saracens present a far different challenge, but Gloucester will enter the game in good spirits.

As is always the case at the home game closest to Remembrance Day, there was the usual impeccably observed minute's silence before the game began and Gloucester wore a specially designed Poppy shirt.

The rain had thankfully passed by the time the game got underway, but conditions were still damp underfoot. Gloucester looked to play with width in the opening few minutes but ran into some pretty robust Irish tackling.

There was plenty of possession for the Cherry and Whites in the opening ten minutes, but yards were hard earned and little sign of any telling line breaks, only a quickly taken tap by Willi Heinz alarming the Irish defence.

Apart from that, the main points to note in the opening quarter were Gloucester looking dominant at scrum time. There were plenty of stoppages as players sought treatment and there was no real flow to the game.

The breakthrough finally came on 23 minutes. Jacob Rowan popped up with a couple of good carries in the build-up, but skipper Willi Heinz caught Irish napping with a quick tap penalty and touched down by the post. Billy Burns added the conversion.

The score seemed to settle the side down and the second try followed on 29 minutes. Polledri provided the back row battering ram on this occasion, Billy Burns made a half break which got John Afoa over the gain line, but it was Val Rapava Ruskin who finished from close range.

But Irish received a boost on 33 minutes when a rare attack had Gloucester under pressure, and skipper Willi Heinz was yellow carded for what looked like a deliberate knock on with the defence stretched.

Minus a man, Gloucester played it smart and kept it tight. Trinder's low grubber forced an error and gave his team a lineout deep in the Irish 22. The catch and drive was halted just short, but quick ball allowed Twelvetrees to put Tom Hudson over.

The conversion from Burns gave Gloucester a well-earned 19-0 half-time lead and the Cherry and Whites looked well set. The pack were providing a powerful platform and the backs were slowly but surely starting to find some room to manoeuvre.

The advantage had been earned the hard way. If anything, visitors had more experience in the back line than up front and their spirited defence had made it hard work for Gloucester. But chinks in the armour were starting to appear.

Heinz returned without further addition to the score and Andy Symons replaced the limping Henry Purdy, before Irish got themselves back into the game when prop Ollie Hoskins burrowed his way over from close range, Greig Tonks converting to narrow the gap to 19-7.

Gloucester hit back in emphatic style. The pack looked to have earned a penalty try but had to settle for a couple of resets. However, the pressure up front told and Jeremy Thrush had the presence of mind to touch the ball against the foot of the post to score, Twelvetrees adding the extras.

Henry Trinder then showed the class that we all know he's capable of. He firstly tapped a cross-kick back inside to Lewis Ludlow then took the return pass. Twinkling footwork and a hand-off then saw him outmuscle an Irish defender before he tiptoed his way down the line to score a beauty. Twelvetrees again converted for a 33-7 lead.

Gloucester then started to cut loose. Superb link-up play between Braley, Twelvetrees and Evans saw Gloucester stretch the Irish defence as they attacked ambitiously from deep. Braley kept up with play and, several phases later, battled his way over from a metre out.

Evans then delayed a pass beautifully for James Hanson to make the key breakthrough for the final try, this time finished off by the rampaging Jake Polledri who stormed home from 25 metres out, a fitting reward for a fine performance.

There was some late resistance from the Exiles who were looking for a consolation score. Hanson was sinbinned as Gloucester pulled down a maul near the line but the home team kept their line intact and closed out the win.

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