

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2017**

**KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**GLOUCESTER MAINTAIN UNBEATEN HOME RECORD  
WITH MAGNIFICENT WIN OVER SARACENS**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 23 SARACENS 17**

Probably the best, most gutsy performance of the season as Gloucester stay unbeaten at home following a hard-fought but deserved 23-17 Aviva Premiership win over Saracens on Friday evening.

In what was most definitely a game of two halves, Gloucester fought back from firstly a 3-9 and then a 6-14 deficit to snatch back the momentum and ultimately secure a famous win – only Saracens' second defeat of the season.

It had looked most unlikely at half-time. After Gloucester opened the scoring with a Billy Twelvetrees penalty, Saracens took control of the game and barely gave the Cherry and Whites a sniff of possession.

The deficit was only six points at half-time, and that was mainly down to some magnificent defence. All the action had taken place in and around the Gloucester 22 and the home tackling had to be on the money.

The Cherry and Whites had probably only entered the Saracens half twice at this point. The carries and metres-made stats all favoured the visitors. More of the same would have clinched a solid if unspectacular away win.

However, the second half saw Gloucester battle their way back into things. They even had to overcome the massive setback of conceding a controversial try by Schalk Brits – it would have broken a lesser team.

But Gloucester's sheer doggedness and team spirit saw them fight back, backed by incredible support from the Kingsholm crowd who well and truly provided the 16th man on the night.

Ollie Thorley's try finally broke the seemingly impregnable Saracens defence, before Tom Hudson finished off a build-up of real patience from the forwards.

Then came the inevitable response from the European champions. They thought they'd scored to make it a nervous final few minutes, but the TMO determined otherwise and finally settled for a Ben Spencer penalty with the last kick of the game to earn a losing bonus point.

The win moves Gloucester up to third place in the table, for the time being at least, and the self-belief in the squad grows that little bit more ahead of next Friday's testing trip to Newcastle.

Good teams like Exeter, Northampton and Saracens have now come to Kingsholm and lost. Slowly but surely, fortress Kingsholm is being re-built.

The lengthy injury list hopefully starting to ease a little, and the Cherry and Whites find themselves in a good place ahead of the trip to the North-East.

On a brisk but dry evening, conditions were perfect but Gloucester were largely pinned back in the opening exchanges, Willi Heinz having to box kick his way out of his own 22 on several occasions as Saracens applied the pressure, keeping play in the home half.

But one early attack from deep, which saw Andy Symons make good yards, showed Gloucester's attacking intent with ball in hand.

It led to a long-range penalty chance for Billy Twelvetrees, which the centre slotted with ease for a 3-0 lead after 8 minutes, only for Alex Lozowski to level matters two minutes later as Gloucester were penalised for holding on following the restart.

The visitors were certainly dominating possession at this stage, and asking real questions of the Gloucester defence. But Gloucester were standing firm, and Lozowski opted for a drop at goal on 16 minutes when he ran out of options, only to push it wide.

However, after another serious phase of pressure, John Afoa was singled out for getting in the way of the clear out and Lozowski had an easy kick from in front of the posts for a 3-6 lead.

Saracens were pragmatic at this point, Wigglesworth kicking high and long on a regular basis and the kick chase applying the pressure. Billy Burns was half charged down as Gloucester tried to exit as Saracens maintained the stranglehold.

And the kick chase tactics almost paid off on 31 minutes, Willi Heinz claiming a high kick from Alex Goode but being immediately tackled and conceding the penalty on the floor. Lozowski dragged the penalty wide of the left hand upright, though.

The pressure was building and building, Saracens opting to kick for the corner on several occasions as time ticked away in the first half. The Gloucester defence bent but crucially didn't break.

However, a lost lineout just as the Cherry and Whites looked set to exit their own territory resulted in another penalty chance for Lozowski, and the fly-half duly made it 3-9 which was the half-time score.

It had been an attritional 40 minutes to be generous. Saracens had dominated territory and possession but not yet been able to break down a resolute Gloucester defence. The Cherry and Whites had barely touched the ball and hardly got out of their own half.

Gloucester needed to regroup at half-time but they were still very much in the game on the scoreboard. The challenge was to try and get enough meaningful possession and spend sufficient time in the Saracens half to create some chances.

Gloucester had defended magnificently, but another 40 minutes like the first would see the visitors squeeze the life out of the game.

Largely subdued up to this point, the home crowd roared their approval at the start of the second half as a Tom Hudson break took play into the Saracens half. Ruan Ackermann was up in support but his pass to Twelvetrees was slightly off the mark and the chance was gone.

Gloucester were finally getting their hands on a bit of ball, the forwards picking and going to good effect, but the Saracens defence was stifling and showing no signs of offering a glimmer of a chance.

The hard work finally paid off as Billy Twelvetrees kicked a penalty for not rolling away, but Saracens promptly extended their lead in controversial circumstances.

As the visitors closed in on the line, there appeared to be a blocking line run, taking out defenders, before Schalk Brits crossed. The visitors knew it, quickly taking a drop goal conversion, but the officials either failed to spot anything or act upon it. 6-14 on 54 minutes.

Twelvetrees added his third penalty to narrow the gap, before Gloucester finally breached the Saracens defence with a cracker. Vellacott and Symons made telling breaks, but it was a lovely chip from Billy Burns that found Ollie Thorley on the right wing for the score. Twelvetrees converted for a 16-14 lead.

Gloucester had their tails up and incredibly pounced for their second try in six minutes. It was earned the hard way, the forwards making hard yard after hard yard. But it was full-back Tom Hudson who took the ball at pace to score near the posts. The conversion made it 23-14.

But Saracens are champions for a reason and almost hit straight back. The visitors thought they'd scored near the posts, but the TMO ruled just short while brave defence from the subsequent five metre scrum kept the line intact.

The visitors threw everything at Gloucester and, trailing by two scores, had to play more expansively only to run into some inspired home defence, every tackle earning a roar from the passionate home crowd.

And time simply ran out on Saracens. Awarded a penalty with just seconds to spare, they opted for a penalty from Ben Spencer to earn a losing bonus point and mean that they took something away from a game that they had dominated for so long.

The Gloucester faithful good-naturedly booed what was probably the correct decision before, quite rightly, applauding the efforts of their own team.

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