

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2017**

**KINGSHOLM – EUROPEAN RUGBY CHALLENGE CUP**

**GLOUCESTER RUN RIOT IN ELEVEN TRY DEMOLITION  
OF OUTGUNNED ZEBRE**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 69 ZEBRE RUGBY CLUB 12**

Gloucester gave their fans an early Christmas present at Kingsholm on Saturday afternoon, outclassing a Zebre side who were a shadow of the team who pushed Gloucester so hard last weekend; 69-12 the final score in this European Rugby Challenge Cup fixture.

Ollie Thorley will capture the headlines for his four well taken tries but, in truth, this was a simply dominant team performance which keeps Gloucester hot on the heels of Pau at the top of pool three.

The gap remains at three points, with Gloucester still to travel to Agen and then entertain Pau. It's all still very much to play for and today's result has done wonders for Gloucester's tries and points scored totals.

Equally as importantly, with the next few weeks and the return to Aviva Premiership action in mind, the team also seemed to come through unscathed in terms of injuries. Mission accomplished on the day.

Gloucester effectively had this in the bag after only 20 minutes. The try scoring bonus point was already secured by that point and it was obvious that Zebre were a far different animal from the one that Gloucester faced in Parma last weekend.

Both sides had made several changes from last weekend's encounter but Gloucester's greater strength in depth was apparent as they dominated from the off.

Zebre had little answer to the hordes and green and grey shirts that constantly poured forward. But, they defended bravely, and got some reward for their efforts late on when they scored two late tries.

They will still have a part to play in the final outcome of this pool as they've yet to travel to Pau but, for now, they will just want to get back home.

The game got off to something of a subdued start. Gloucester conceded a couple of early penalties to allow the Italian side to easily exit their 22 from the kick-off, and handling errors on both sides affected the flow of the game.

But Gloucester broke the deadlock on eight minutes. Billy Burns found David Halaifonua at full tilt and the winger took play into the Zebre 22. A few patient phases followed before Burns dummied his way through a gap and put Halaifonua over for the game's first try. Twelvetrees converted for 7-0.

Things quickly got worse for Zebre as a sublime offload from Josh Hohnock allowed Freddie Clarke to make a powerful break out of his own 22, only for his potential scoring pass to be knocked on deliberately by Ciaran Gaffney. The full-back was promptly shown yellow.

Burns drilled the penalty into the Zebre 22, where the pack drove it on powerfully. But it was the backs who executed a lovely wrap around move for Olly Thorley to slice through and score the second. 12-0 after 12 minutes.

Gloucester kept up the momentum as more indiscipline saw them move straight back into the 22. Again the pack made good yards, but it was another beautifully weighted dink from Burns to Halaifonua that saw the winger gather for his second try and a 17-0 lead.

The bonus point was in the bag before the 20 minute mark. Once again, the pack asserted their superiority to get over the gain line before Freddie Clarke spun out of a tackle near the line to power over under the posts. Twelvetrees had a simple conversion.

Will Safe was the next to cross as the Italians seemed to visibly wilt. More patient build-up play, backs and forwards both carrying well, laid the platform before Will Safe ran a great line to take a short pass from Freddie Clarke and burst clear to score. A big moment for the debutant and Twelvetrees added the extras.

Gaffney returned from the sinbin and Zebre enjoyed their best spell of the game, keeping the ball alive well and asking some questions of the Gloucester defence.

However, with a score beckoning, they turned the ball over near the Gloucester line and Jake Polledri pounced. He didn't quite have the legs to go all the way but made a good 60 metres before offloading for Charlie Sharples to finish. Twelvetrees converted once more.

There was still sufficient time for Gloucester to take advantage of a Zebre handling error, Cameron Orr breaking a tackle and going over untouched for Gloucester's seventh. Twelvetrees converted and it was 45-0 at half-time.

The Italians were unrecognisable from the side that had pushed Gloucester so hard in Parma last weekend. Gloucester were simply bossing the game at this stage, dominating the physical battle and guaranteeing themselves a surfeit of possession to work with.

Burns in particular was making the most of it, challenging the Italian defensive line and tormenting the back three with a series of perfectly weighted chips while backs and forwards alike were running riot with ball in hand.

Zebre made a host of changes at half-time in a bid to change their fortunes while Gloucester introduced Owen Williams for Billy Burns. And it was the Gloucester man who made an immediate impact, floating a cross-kick to Ollie Thorley for the winger to leap high and score his second. Twelvetrees slotted his sixth conversion.

Gloucester were relentless, and a powerful catch and drive was illegally dragged down by Tommaso D'Apice, the former Gloucester man shown a yellow card. The subsequent catch and drive resulted in a try for Motu Matu'u and a 57-0 lead.

Zebre to their credit threatened briefly after an interception from Leonard Krunov, but Gloucester stole a lineout near their own line, moved downfield and Ollie Thorley made no mistake when given a one on one against a Zebre prop and had way too much pace as he completed his hat-trick. Owen Williams added an excellent touchline conversion.

The hour mark came and went, and a rare Zebre attack resulted in a yellow card for Freddie Clarke, an interesting decision given Gloucester's dominance and the lack of penalties they'd given away.

A lot of the spark had gone out of the game by this point. The outcome was beyond question and both teams had used plenty of replacements. The Italians in particular would have quite happily ended the game early.

They did get some reward as winger Praticchetti crossed wide out on the left as his team-mates kept the ball alive well with some neat offloading. But this was swiftly cancelled out as Williams slid a perfect kick through for Thorley to claim his fourth.

And the Italians did get the final word as, after a period of pressure, Valerio Bernabo managed to force his way over from close range, Bordoli adding the conversion. But it was merely a consolation.