

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2017

RICOH ARENA – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**GLOUCESTER'S BRAVE EFFORT COMES UP SHORT AT WASPS
ON SATURDAY**

WASPS 49 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 24

Gloucester looked well set to continue their decent run of form when they led Wasps 17-15 at half-time at the Ricoh Arena. However, they were unable to withstand a second-half fightback from the home side who ran out winners by 49 points to 24.

It was a day when the final score-line didn't really do Gloucester justice. The Cherry and Whites led at half-time and pushed hard at the start of the second half to extend their lead.

However, the momentum swung massively as the Cherry and Whites lost a five metre lineout when pushing for the try scoring bonus point. Some skullduggery on the deck snaffled possession for Wasps and Thomas Young's try from long distance was a genuine body blow.

It was a let off for Wasps and a bonus at the same time. And the home team took full advantage as Gloucester were guilty of a number of errors, while the majority of the refereeing decisions started to go the way of the home side.

That said, Gloucester gave themselves hope as Freddie Clarke's late try secured the try scoring bonus point and narrowed the gap to nine points. However, as Gloucester thought about chasing the losing bonus point, two late tries for Dan Robson and Christian Wade gave the scoreboard a somewhat flattering look for Wasps.

A day of what might have been for the Cherry and Whites. They went toe to toe with Wasps for long periods, but those key intangibles went the way of the home team and that proved to be the difference.

There were plenty of scoring chances for Gloucester in that second half, but Wasps were the more clinical after the break and it proved to be the difference.

Gloucester currently occupy third place in the Aviva Premiership table and can finish the first half of the season in no worse than fourth place. Progress has been made so far this season but everyone will be determined to bounce back next week at home to Sale.

On the day in front of a 27,000 crowd, an early handling error put Gloucester under pressure as they tried to run the ball out of their own 22 from the kick-off. Wasps moved the ball wide from the resulting scrum, but Christian Wade was well marshalled into touch.

Superb work at the breakdown from Jake Polledri followed, the flanker winning a penalty as Wasps failed to release, and Gloucester were able to move into the home half for the first time.

However, a Gloucester handling error at the base of a scrum in their own 22 led to the opening score for the home team, Willie Le Roux leaving the defence flat footed as he dummied his way over in the corner from the next scrum. Cipriani couldn't convert but it was 5-0 after 13 minutes.

But Gloucester weren't fazed and, thanks to some Wasps indiscipline, moved menacingly into the home 22. The Wasps defence was initially robust, but skipper Willi Heinz spotted a gap from close range and darted over. Twelvetrees added the conversion for 5-7.

However, while Twelvetrees waited to kick the extras, Gloucester were dealt a blow as Paddy McAllister was helped off the field, having picked up a knock in the build-up. Josh Hohneck came on to replace the Irishman.

Wasps looked to hit back straightaway and came perilously close to doing so, patient build-up play giving Wade an opening on the right only for Gloucester's cover defence to get over and prevent grounding.

The Cherry and Whites then stunned the home crowd with a peach of a try from first phase. Swift hands and a long cut-out pass gave Ollie Thorley room and the winger ran straight over Willie Le Roux before Christian Wade got to him. However, his offload found Mark Atkinson in support and the centre glided over to score.

The home crowd erupted into a cacophony of boos, thinking Thorley's offload was forward. But the ball went backward and was flicked forward by Wade's trailing boot – an excellent call by the officials.

Atkinson had to leave the field soon afterwards for an HIA, Henry Trinder taking his place, and Danny Cipriani narrowed the gap to 8-12 with a 32nd minute penalty as Gloucester played the ball on the floor.

Wasps kept up the momentum and promptly took the lead. There was more than a hint of the lineout being not straight, but referee Maxwell-Keys allowed play to continue and Wade cut a good angle to fight his way to the line.

Once again, Gloucester showed their mettle by striking back immediately. Backs and forwards combined to good effect, before an opening was created on the right and Tom Marshall stepped Joe Simpson to score Gloucester's third.

It gave Gloucester a narrow 15-17 lead at half-time, one they just about deserved after a 40 minutes in which both teams had played some scintillating rugby. The Cherry and Whites were edging it, and had scored three tries to two, but there was still plenty of rugby to play yet.

The second-half got off a disjointed start due to treatment being required by a couple of players and Gloucester looked the more likely to score, but were hit by a sucker punch on 49 minutes.

Having missed a five metre lineout, Gloucester were then turned over in the Wasps 22. Le Roux inspired the counter-attack and found Thomas Young on his inside in support, the flanker sprinting home from 50 metres out. It was controversial – Tom Cruse's left arm never left the tackled player before he played the ball at the breakdown and Kyle Eastmond's pass to Le Roux was at least a yard forward.

Cipriani added the conversion and then added a penalty to make it an eight point lead at 25-17 as Gloucester sacked a maul.

The Cherry and Whites badly needed the next score, but their accuracy and their indiscipline had slipped and Cipriani was able to add another penalty for 28-17 as the hour mark approached.

The momentum was now well and truly behind the home side and, aided by a number of key refereeing decisions, they began to turn the screw as Gloucester struggled to get any meaningful possession.

And Wasps seemed to put the outcome beyond any reasonable doubt when Guy Thompson broke a tackle on 67 minutes to score Wasps' fourth try of the afternoon, Cipriani converting to continue his excellent afternoon with the boot.

Freddie Clarke smashed his way over to ensure Gloucester would take something from the game as he secured the try scoring bonus point and gave rise to hopes of a losing bonus point as well.

However, two soft tries for Robson and Wade quashed that thought as quickly as it had come to life and sent the home crowd off into the winter night happy with their early Christmas present.