

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 26, 2018**

**KINGSHOLM – ANGLO WELSH CUP**

**GLOUCESTER OVERCOME BATTLING OSPREYS TO KEEP  
ANGLO-WELSH HOPES ALIVE**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 43 OSPREYS 20**

Gloucester overcome battling Ospreys to keep Anglo-Welsh hopes alive. Job done for Gloucester in terms of clinching a bonus point Anglo-Welsh win over the Ospreys on Friday evening, but the visitors made them work awfully hard for the 43-20 victory at Kingsholm.

A youthful Ospreys side, which featured very few of their big names, James Hook notwithstanding, were largely written off by the book-makers before the game but went a long way to upsetting the odds.

Indeed, having battled back from a 12-0 deficit midway through the first half, the visitors battled their way into a 15-12 lead early in the second half and were good value for it.

At that point, an out of sorts Gloucester needed to do something and to do it quickly. Thankfully they did, running in five tries in the final half hour to ease to what looked on the scoreboard to be a comfortable win.

There will be lessons learned but, for now, the win keeps Gloucester's hopes of qualifying for the semi-finals alive although a testing trip to Newcastle lies ahead next weekend.

Gloucester started the game with some intent, testing the Ospreys defence in the early exchanges and turning down a kick at goal in favour of kicking to the corner. It almost paid off but Fraser Balmain was held up over the line and the visitors were able to clear.

And, after a couple of soft penalties moved play downfield, the Ospreys had the first chance of points on 11 minutes but fly-half Luke Price pushed his attempted penalty kick well wide of the right hand upright.

The Ospreys were enjoying a good spell at this point, and scrum-half Reuben Morgan-Williams almost dummied his way clear from a ruck around halfway, but the Gloucester defence quickly regrouped.

Price and former Gloucester favourite James Hook then combined to take play into the home 22, and the Kingsholm crowd did their best to lift their team. It took a huge hit from David Halaifonua to deny Dafydd Howells on the left.

It seemed to spur Gloucester into action. Billy Burns was able to turn two penalty awards into a decent territory gain and his pack set up the catch and drive. It was perfectly executed and Richard Hibbard touched down. Burns added an excellent touchline conversion for 7-0 after 21 minutes.

The second try followed immediately. A lovely long pass from Burns freed Henry Purdy on the right and Callum Braley was up in support. Braley almost made the line but was hauled down just short. However, Mark Atkinson was up in support and took the offload to score.

The next action of note was a mass brawl as Will Safe seemed to be guilty of a neck roll at a ruck. After consultation with the TMO, Safe was penalised but the penalty reversed for retaliation and a lecture was issued to both teams.

Gloucester started to push hard for the third try, and slick offloads from Morgan and Halaifonua almost turned into scoring passes but for some spirited defence.

However, the Ospreys almost hit back as flanker Will Jones took a short pass to burst through a gap only to be flattened by a huge hit by Halaifonua. It was ruled a no arms tackle and shook Jones to the core.

Jones left for an HIA and the Ospreys went to the corner with the penalty, but Gloucester muscled up in defence.

A five metre scrum followed but the home pack drove the Ospreys eight off their own ball to the delight of the crowd.

The Cherry and Whites were still looking a bit loose in possession and very nearly conceded with two minutes left of the half as Morgan-Williams chased a kick through, hacked ahead but saw the ball run dead before he could touch down.

But there was still time for the visitors to pounce, a handling error compounded by a penalty conceded and it led to prop Alex Jeffries muscling his way over from close range. Price converted and the Ospreys were back in it.

It was the least the visitors deserved to be honest as, apart from conceding the two quick-fire tries, they'd looked more than competitive on the night. Gloucester had shown some good signs, but not been accurate enough with ball in hand.

The Ospreys were certainly frustrating the Cherry and Whites at this point and perhaps surprising a few people given the unfamiliar names in their side. Gloucester would need to improve in the second 40 minutes.

But Gloucester were stunned at the start of the second period. Morgan-Williams found Gloucester napping around the breakdown and chipped ahead. Callum Braley couldn't gather and Morgan-Williams touched down. Price could only hit the upright with the conversion to leave the score at 12 points apiece.

The Ospreys were visibly growing in confidence and these were challenging times for the Cherry and Whites. It came as no real surprise when the visitors took a 50th minute lead courtesy of a penalty from Price.

Gloucester badly needed a lift and it came from two of their most experienced players. Ben Morgan carried powerfully into the Ospreys 22, well supported by Richard Hibbard. It took play into the red zone and Callum Braley wriggled his way over for the third try and a 17-15 lead.

And, just as in the first half, one try immediately followed another. With advantage being played, Gloucester unleashed a slick backs move which saw Henry Purdy fire out a long pass to Ollie Thorley and the winger had just enough room to dive over in the corner. Burns again added a fine conversion from out wide.

There was still time for the Ospreys to battle their way back into the game, but Gloucester finally put the game to bed on 68 minutes. It was almost a repeat of the previous score, but it was Henry Trinder finishing well on the left on this occasion.

The Ospreys were now starting to feel the strain of their sterling effort and yellow cards were issued to Morgan Morris and Lloyd Ashley to deplete their numbers. As a result it came as no surprise when Ben Morgan finished off a well-executed catch and drive.

To their credit, the undermanned Ospreys pack fashioned a try for replacement hooker Ifan Phillips in the corner. But the final word went to Gloucester, Matt Scott hitting an excellent line at pace to power over; Burns' conversion, his fourth of the night, completing the scoring.

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