

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2018

KINGSTON PARK – ANGLO WELSH CUP

**NEWCASTLE TAKE THE SPOILS IN HARD-FOUGHT
ANGLO-WELSH ENCOUNTER**

NEWCASTLE FALCONS 31 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 19

A battling effort on the day from Gloucester in Saturday's Anglo-Welsh Cup tie at Newcastle, but the Cherry and Whites didn't really get the rewards their efforts merited as the hosts took the win by 31 points to 19.

Gloucester came into the game knowing that their Anglo-Welsh Cup hopes had come to an end the night before with Bath picking up a bonus point win at the Ospreys. But there was still a job to do and plenty to play for.

And those on duty at a cold and rainy Kingston Park on Saturday afternoon didn't let themselves down, fighting hard from start to finish.

However, Gloucester will look back on this game and think that it was one that got away, given the number of scoring chances that were created but not taken in the 80 minutes. For Gloucester not to take a single point away from the game was harsh.

On the day, the Gods didn't smile on the Cherry and Whites – so many 50-50 calls didn't go their way while the Gloucester forwards charged down at least three kicks only for the ball to bounce unkindly.

So, for now, it's the end of the Anglo-Welsh Cup for Gloucester as a team. But Kingsholm will still play its part, staging the Final on March 18th; tickets available now.

The Cherry and Whites started brightly, but the Falcons showed their ambition by turning down a kickable penalty and going for the corner after only five minutes, only for Gloucester to disrupt the lineout.

And Gloucester then quietened the home crowd by taking an eighth minute lead. Ben Vellacott spotted space down the blindside, swapped passes with Ben Morgan and scampered home for a slick try with the final pass having taken out the last defender. Owen Williams added the conversion.

However, the Falcons were quick to respond. A high tackle on Goneva allowed Toby Flood to go to the corner again.

The initial surge was repelled but Newcastle stayed patient around the fringes and hooker Kyle Cooper forced his way over from close range. Flood converted to level the scores after 16 minutes.

Gloucester weren't deterred from playing their usual open game, and Mark Atkinson was unfortunate shortly afterwards as his sharp break took him through a gap only for a flailing Falcons hand to knock the ball from his grasp.

One area of concern at this stage for Gloucester was the up and under. The home side weren't shy of launching a high kick, and they were doing it to great effect with the kick chase putting real pressure on the catcher.

Gloucester then had an escape on 24 minutes as the defensive line was breached after good carries from Hogg and Latu. Play swept right and Hogg was unlucky to be held up over the line as he powered forward.

The home team had a five metre scrum though, and A1 field position. The scrum effort was held out, but patient work around the fringes eventually allowed Cooper to burrow over for his second from close range. Joel Hodgson converted for 14-7 after 26 minutes.

The bounce of the ball was certainly going the way of the home team at this stage and a couple of 50/50 decisions went against Gloucester when the ball went loose, Michael Young picking up possession and offloading for Mark Wilson to gallop home. Hodgson converted for 21-7.

Gloucester had an immediate chance to strike back, winning a scrum penalty and going to the corner. The catch and drive was held out though and Hammersley defused Williams' cross kick, meant for Henry Purdy.

But the Cherry and Whites made no mistake from a similar opportunity just a couple of minutes later, patiently setting up the drive and Gareth Evans bursting clear to score. Williams added an excellent conversion and Gloucester were back in it.

As half-time approached, Gloucester were pushing hard to get back on level terms. Jeremy Thrush just couldn't hold on to a Williams cross kick, and another five metre lineout chance went begging.

But the Cherry and Whites were still within a score as referee O'Grady brought proceedings to a close, and could count themselves slightly unlucky to be trailing having produced a competitive first 40 minutes against a strong Falcons side.

However, Newcastle struck first after the restart as a clearance kick failed to find touch.

The counter caught Gloucester short on the right flank and Goneva was able to put Alex Tait over. Hodgson slotted the extras for 28-14 and immediately added a penalty as Gloucester were caught offside in defence.

The game lost a bit of its shape as the hour mark approached, with both teams making several replacements. Gloucester were still battling but they still weren't getting the rub of the green in terms of the decisions.

The Cherry and Whites did finally get some reward for their efforts on 65 minutes though, as Matt Scott, who had made a telling break in the build-up, scythed his way through from 35 metres out for his team's third try.

Gloucester kept pushing and Aaron Hinkley thought he'd marked his first senior appearance as he dived over in the right-hand corner. However, the Assistant Referee had other ideas and ruled that the young flanker had put a foot in touch.

Still the Cherry and Whites fought as they sought the fourth try that would have secured a try scoring bonus point and a losing bonus point.

Chances came and went, but it didn't quite happen and Newcastle advance to the semi-finals.

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