

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2018**

**KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**HONOURS EVEN AT KINGSHOLM AS GLOUCESTER ARE DENIED  
BY LAST MINUTE TRY**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 25 WASPS 25**

Gloucester Rugby and Wasps slugged out a thrilling Aviva Premiership encounter at Kingsholm on Saturday, Jimmy Gopperth slotting a conversion with the last kick of the match to earn Wasps a 25-25 draw.

It went to the wire, and credit to Wasps for their second half effort which secured them a share of the spoils, especially Gopperth's nerve for that final conversion.

But Gloucester will be deeply disappointed that a potentially memorable victory slipped away from them in this way. They'd bounced back after weathering a furious second-half comeback from the visitors and had taken a crucial lead through Henry Trinder's try.

And, with just a couple of minutes remaining, Gloucester were camped on the Wasps line and pushing hard for the bonus point try. However, they were turned over and Wasps held their nerve to move downfield and create the opening for Christian Wade to score.

Wade had been a thorn in Gloucester's side throughout the second half, and there was a certain inevitability about his involvement in the final action.

A draw seemed an unlikely outcome when Gloucester, looking to bounce back after defeat at Worcester last weekend, dominated the first-half and took a deserved 18-6 lead into the break.

But Wasps' fightback was expected and impressive. Even then, the Cherry and Whites seemed to have won a key mini-battle as they defended their line with pride as the hour mark approached.

However, perhaps concentration wavered for a second as, having cleared their lines, Gloucester were sliced open by a run from Wade and Dan Robson scored on his former stomping ground.

Thomas Young did likewise against his former club to bring Wasps level, only for Gloucester to show their mettle by hitting back through Henry Trinder's try with just ten minutes left to play.

At that point, Gloucester looked well set to clinch their 10th Premiership win of the season, but that final momentum swing left the Cherry and Whites shattered.

Gloucester now drop to sixth place in the table, and next weekend's meeting against Newcastle Falcons at Kingsholm takes on real significance.

After a minute's applause in memory of the tragic loss of Doncaster Knights prop Ian Williams last week, the game got underway in bitterly cold but sunny conditions at Kingsholm.

Gloucester looked lively in the opening exchanges, moving the ball from side to side without getting much change from the Wasps defence. However, the pack forced a penalty at Wasps' first scrum of the day and Billy Twelvetrees had no problem opening the scoring, taking him past 500 Premiership points in the process.

The Cherry and Whites followed up with some decent phases of play, keeping the visitors pinned back in their own half. But no further score came and Wasps slowly but surely started to work their way into the game.

However, a slick backs move which saw Jason Woodward make good ground into the Wasps 22 forced a penalty from the visitors.

The kick went to the corner, the catch and drive was perfectly executed and Richard Hibbard touched down. Twelvetrees added a fine conversion for a 10-0 lead after 18 minutes.

Hibbard nearly added his second shortly afterwards, but was ruled to have grounded the ball just short before the support moved it over the line; a five metre scrum the reward for Gloucester.

Charlie Sharples took the ball on the crash from the subsequent scrum, Wasps killed the ball and Twelvetrees sensibly took a straightforward three points for a 13-0 lead. However, Gloucester played the ball on the ground from the restart and Jimmy Gopperth nailed his first penalty of the day from head on to the posts.

The officials then missed a blatant forward pass from Wasps as the visitors attacked from deep, and it led to a position from which Gopperth had an easy kick for his second penalty and narrowed the gap to 13-6.

But Gloucester regrouped and hit back with a lovely score. Wasps failed to find touch and Trinder launched a counter. Callum Braley moved play to the blindside, Jason Woodward broke clear and Charlie Sharples was on his shoulder to finish.

Twelvetrees couldn't convert but the lead was now 18-6 and remained the case until half-time. It had been a good half of rugby up to his point with both sides looking to play some open rugby and Gloucester a big improvement on last week.

The Cherry and Whites deservedly had the advantage at the interval, if nothing else for their potency in attack with ball in hand where Jason Woodward in particular was having a very good afternoon.

However, despite being restricted to two Gopperth penalties, Wasps had shown enough threat to indicate that there was a long way to go in this game just yet.

There was an early alarm for Gloucester as Billy Burns was taken by a trailing leg as he chased his own chip ahead. He required lengthy treatment but was able to continue before Jason Woodward lifted the crowd with a superb run from his own half.

The game then had two lengthy delays for injuries as, firstly, Wasps lost de Jongh and Mullan before Henry Trinder took a forearm to the head as he moved to tackle Jimmy Gopperth and went off for an HIA.

It was Wasps who were pressing though, and a series of Gloucester penalties allowed the visitors to lay siege to the Gloucester line. Thomas Young looked to have scored on 51 minutes but lost the ball as he attempted to ground it.

Wasps had a penalty advantage though, and opted for a five metre scrum. Gloucester were penalised twice and replaced both props, but a third penalty saw Paddy McAllister sinbinned for a team offence after just a minute on the pitch.

Gloucester were clearly creaking and sacrificed David Halaifonua to allow Hohneck to return, but the scrum dug deep and Kingsholm erupted in glee as Christian Wade knocked on as he tried to exploit the gap on the right. It was a big defensive stand.

But Wade promptly got his own back as the clearance failed to find touch and Wade sliced through a gap in midfield before finding the unmarked Dan Robson inside him, and the former Gloucester man crossed untouched. Gopperth converted and it was game on at 18-13.

The tension was rising at Kingsholm and Billy Twelvetrees had a chance to extend the lead on 61 minutes with a long-range penalty, only for his penalty kick to fade wide of the right hand upright.

It was all Wasps now, with Gloucester hanging on desperately in defence and it came as no real surprise when Thomas Young, who had been excellent once again for the visitors, wriggled over from close range.

Jimmy Gopperth seemed to slip as he tried to convert and hooked his kick horribly wide to leave the score finely poised at 18-18 and the visitors looked the more likely winners.

However, Gloucester showed real heart to get back on the front foot and take the game back to Wasps, slick hands from Burns and Woodward sending Trinder over on the left and the home crowd into raptures, Twelvetrees converting.

It was Wasps turn to reel, and they had to dig deep to keep Gloucester at bay as the home team went for the bonus point try. They succeeded and, showing the resilience that saw them make the final last season, pounced through Wade and Gopperth to earn the draw.

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