

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SUNDAY, APRIL 8, 2018

SANDY PARK – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**GLOUCESTER UNABLE TO COPE WITH EXETER POWER
AS CHIEFS WIN COMFORTABLY**

EXETER CHIEFS 46 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 10

A bad day at the office for the Cherry and Whites who simply never got going against the defending Aviva Premiership champions; the Exeter Chiefs ruthlessly exploiting every opportunity on their way to a 46-10 victory.

Very little went right at Sandy Park for Gloucester, denied an early try and losing skipper Willi Heinz to injury before the Chiefs took an iron grip on proceedings and eased to a straightforward win.

They also fell foul of the referee on numerous occasions in the first half, some justifiably, some more marginal and this, combined with an inability to hold onto possession, gave the Chiefs all the possession and territory they needed.

It meant that Gloucester were very much on the back foot in the first period, but still in touch as half time approached only for ten points conceded late, on allowing Exeter to open up a 22-3 lead.

The second half saw Gloucester desperately try and battle their way back into it but, despite the early encouragement of a Callum Braley try, it was Exeter who kept up the pressure and finished with three further tries of their own.

It was a deeply sobering experience for the Cherry and Whites who came to Sandy Park knowing that a win would get them right back in the mix for a play-off spot but now find themselves having to re-group ahead of next Saturday's game at home to Harlequins.

Gloucester thought they'd struck within the first minute, a Chiefs knock-on giving them great field position. But it was a moment of individual genius from Henry Trinder that almost unlocked the home defence, the centre rolling a kick ahead before re-gathering only to be bundled into touch at the corner.

But a positive start from the Cherry and Whites was rewarded with a sixth minute penalty from Owen Williams, the fly-half knocking over a well-struck kick as Exeter transgressed at a breakdown.

The Chiefs dominated the next few minutes of possession, aided by a couple of forward passes that weren't passed, but looked to have broken through on 14 minutes as Lachie Turner burst clear. Don Armand was in support but Lewis Ludlow made the key tackle and Ruan Ackermann snaffled the offload.

Both teams lost players to injury on 15 minutes, Sam Hill replaced by Jack Nowell for the hosts and Calum Braley coming on for skipper Willi Heinz.

An unfortunate knock-on by Owen Williams then gave the home side the ideal platform to open their account and they made no mistake.

Patient build-up play around the fringes eventually created an opening for Alec Hepburn who spun out of a tackle to score, Joe Simmonds converting.

Exeter were getting all the decisions, including a high tackle on Jack Nowell when the winger was 12 inches off the deck. Slade drilled the ball to the corner and this led to a catch and drive situation from which Sam Simmonds touched down for a 12-3 lead.

The decisions continued to very much favour the home side, and Gloucester were barely able to get their hands on the ball at this stage let alone exit their half. It was turning into a big day of defensive work and sterling efforts restricted the Chiefs to a penalty on 36 minutes which extended the lead to 15-3.

And, as half-time approached, Gloucester were dealt a further blow as Ruan Ackermann was yellow carded for interfering with the ball while on the floor.

And the hosts didn't waste the superiority in numbers, keeping the ball alive well before Hepburn made a key carry and offloaded for Olly Woodburn to step his way to the line. Simmons converted for a 22-3 half-time lead.

Frustratingly, Gloucester hadn't really played that badly, but were being prevented from getting a foothold in the game. From Trinder's disallowed 'try' to Nic White escaping censure for a blatant trip to numerous marginal calls going against them.

The Chiefs are far too good a side to turn down such gifts. Being allowed to dominate possession as a result simply played into their hands and they impressively took full advantage.

Gloucester would really have to cut down on their error count, retain possession when they got it and find a way to get onside with the officials if they were to get anything out of this game.

The second half started well. A penalty allowed Williams to take play into the Exeter half, Mark Atkinson made a great line break and offloaded to the supporting Callum Braley to score. Williams converted to narrow the gap to 22-10.

Joe Simmons responded immediately with a penalty from just inside the Gloucester 10 metre line as John Afoa was penalised for a high tackle on Jack Nowell.

And it was quickly back to business as usual for the Chiefs. They forced a couple of penalties at scrum time and kicked for the corner. Gloucester held around the fringes, but the ball was shipped wide to Nowell who took advantage of the extra man and stepped inside to score. Simmons converted for 32-10.

And bad went to worse for Gloucester as, five minutes later, Nowell somehow wriggled out of a couple of would-be tackles to dash clear and dive over for his second. Simmonds converted once more for 39-10.

Gloucester threw caution to the wind. A couple of chances came and went but they were victims of their own ambition with five minutes to play, when an ambitious offload found only Gareth Steenson who jogged over for a popular score, Simmonds completing the scoring with the conversion.

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