

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, APRIL 14, 2018

KINGSHOLM – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**LATE TRIES FINALLY PUT QUINS AWAY AS GLOUCESTER PREVAIL
BY 37 POINTS TO 9**

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 37 HARLEQUINS 9

Another week and another nail-biter involving Gloucester Rugby who took what seemed like an age to break down Harlequins before finally triumphing by 37 points to 9 and, as a result, move back into the top six of the Aviva Premiership table.

To be honest, the scoreline doesn't really reflect the game. With less than ten minutes to go, Gloucester were in front but the lead was a narrow 16 points to 9. However, three tries in the final nine minutes, the second with no time left on the clock, sent the home crowd into delirium.

Ruan Ackermann scored the vital fourth try, which clinched the try scoring bonus point, and takes Gloucester into sixth place in the table, just three points behind Newcastle in fourth spot.

With the Falcons coming to Kingsholm next Friday in the semi-final of the European Rugby Challenge Cup, an exciting few weeks to finish the season lie ahead.

But, back to day, and Harlequins proved to be a dogged, resolute opponent. Gloucester had the majority of possession, but the visitors tackled like demons and refused to go away. In fact, as the second half ticked by, the nagging feeling grew that Quins could nick it.

Gloucester had squandered a number of good opportunities, but finally made one count on 71 minutes as Jason Woodward flew over in the corner and self-belief was renewed. Jake Polledri scored soon afterwards – they couldn't, could they?

Indeed they could. Ed Slater nicked vital lineout ball in his own 22 and Gloucester moved downfield. They had two cracks at a five metre lineout and the second proved to be decisive, Ruan Ackermann at the bottom of the pile.

Cue scenes of joy at Kingsholm – this squad may be a work in progress, but they believe in each other and they don't give up. Similar self-belief will be required next week against Newcastle, a cracker of a game is in store.

After the heavy rain of earlier in the week, the conditions were glorious as kick off approached although probably still a touch heavy underfoot.

Gloucester started brightly, moving the ball from side to side with one early break from Jason Woodward lifting the crowd. Play moved on and Quins killed the ball, allowing Billy Twelvetrees to open the scoring with a well struck penalty.

Marcus Smith promptly levelled the scores as Gloucester were guilty of their own ambition, caught in possession in their own half, but the Cherry and Whites then scored a cracker for the game's first try.

Mark Atkinson found Billy Twelvetrees with a lovely flat pass to put the latter through a gap and the centre drew the last man to put Callum Braley under the posts. Twelvetrees added the easy conversion for 10-3 after a breathless eight minutes.

It was certainly exciting stuff from Gloucester; the back row were carrying powerfully and the outside backs getting lots of ball to work with. The Kingsholm crowd were liking what they were seeing and getting behind their team in vocal fashion.

Harlequins then took advantage of a number of cheap penalties to move into Gloucester territory and Smith was able to kick his second penalty and narrow the gap to 10-6.

Quins did have an escape when Chris Robshaw avoided a yellow card for what looked like a deliberate knock-on, and also got away with Gloucester squandering an overlap on the right shortly afterwards.

Gloucester continued to press and Quins were manning up in defence, although creaking slightly, and Twelvetrees punished them with his second penalty on 26 minutes as the visitors transgressed at a ruck for a 13-6 lead.

The Cherry and Whites still had the upper hand, but were guilty of not looking after the ball on a number of occasions which halted a number of promising moves and Quins were still well in this as half-time approached.

And, with no time left on the clock, Quins narrowed the gap to 13-9 as Smith slotted his third penalty as Gloucester were penalised at a scrum on their own 22.

Given the amount of possession and territory that Gloucester had enjoyed, the neutral would have been baffled as to how Quins were still in the game. But the visitors were within four points and dangerous.

Gloucester would be incredibly frustrated at having bossed the game but having very little to show for it on the scoreboard. It would be a big second half.

The opening exchanges were frantic, Jason Woodward almost opening up Quins with a jinking run but Mike Brown stealing the ball at a ruck, setting off downfield and just being hauled down by the covering Billy Burns.

But importantly, Gloucester got the next score, concerted pressure forcing Quins to fail to roll away from a ruck near their own line and Twelvetrees chipped over the penalty for a 16-9 lead.

Quins then blew a glorious chance to strike back as indiscipline allowed them two five metre lineouts in succession.

Gloucester held firm before Alofa Alofa knocked on when in acres of space. Smith then missed a very kickable penalty as the tension grew. In hindsight, these were key moments.

Time ticked on, both teams made numerous replacements, but still Gloucester couldn't quite find the accuracy to put the game to bed despite a number of half chances.

Finally, on 71 minutes, Gloucester made the game safe. Gabriel Ibitoye couldn't handle a high kick and Gloucester pounced. Mark Atkinson fired out a wonderful long pass to Henry Trinder and the centre committed the cover before putting Jason Woodward into the corner.

Jake Polledri stepped his way past Mat Luamanu for the third try on 74 minutes after Jason Woodward popped up twice in the build-up and Gloucester, incredibly, were now looking for the try scoring bonus point.

It didn't look on as they conceded a penalty and Quins kicked into the 22. But Ed Slater rose to steal valuable lineout possession and Gloucester's subsequent momentum downfield was irresistible as Quins' discipline deserted them.

Ackermann seemed to be driven over by 14,000 people in the stadium to complete an amazing few minutes for the Cherry and Whites. It's never dull following this club.

JC