

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, MAY 5, 2018

ALLIANZ PARK – AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

SARACENS TOO STRONG FOR GLOUCESTER ON DISAPPOINTING
AFTERNOON AT ALLIANZ PARK

SARACENS 62 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 12

After a promising opening half hour, when they scored two stunning tries, Gloucester simply couldn't live with the pace and power of Saracens who dominated the second half on their way to a 62-12 Aviva Premiership win at Allianz Park on Saturday.

The defeat sees the Cherry and Whites finish in seventh place in the final Aviva Premiership table, and perhaps looking back ruefully on certain games earlier this year where points slipped away.

However today, despite a decent start, Gloucester paid the price for conceding scores just before and after half-time. It gave the home team an advantage that paved the way for them to turn on the style in the final half hour as mistakes and indiscipline took a toll.

Having been competitive until that key score for Owen Farrell just on half time, Gloucester fell away as Saracens piled on the pressure, delighting the home crowd who were in carnival mode as they bade a fond farewell to the popular Schalk Brits amongst others.

It's a disappointing end to the Premiership season for Gloucester who were top four contenders for so long. The challenge now is to bounce back for next weekend's European Challenge Cup Final. After the disappointment of defeat at the same stage last year, motivation won't be an issue.

Gloucester stunned the home crowd by scoring a cracker in the very first minute. Attacking from deep, Jason Woodward made the initial break before linking with Ben Vellacott and Andy Symons. The centre drew the last man and put Tom Seabrook over for a debut try.

Saracens tried to hit back at once, stretching the Cherry and Whites in defence, but a Gloucester hand got in the way of a potentially scoring pass to Sean Maitland to knock the ball dead and concede a five metre scrum which Gloucester defended well.

However, Gloucester were undone on 11 minutes as the departing Schalk Brits caught the fringe defence napping at a ruck on the 22. The supporting Wigglesworth was tackled just short, but the ball was quickly transferred left for Sean Maitland to go over untouched with Farrell adding the conversion for 7-5.

The Cherry and Whites were looking good with ball in hand, and scored another blinder on 15 minutes. Ludlow sent Woodward sprinting down the left and the full-back eluded the grasp of Marcelo Bosch before finding David Haliafonua with the inside pass to send the winger strolling over behind the posts. Billy Twelvetrees added the extras.

However, Gloucester were perhaps guilty of over-ambition as they turned the ball over attacking from the restart. The home side didn't waste the opportunity, eventually creating an opening for Liam Williams to finish well on the right and level the scores at 12-12 after 20 minutes.

It had been a breathless first quarter, with perhaps the only surprise being that a water break wasn't taken after Farrell's missed conversion.

The relentless nature of game duly continued, and Saracens thought they'd gone ahead again on 23 minutes as Alex Goode scythed though before finding Sean Maitland to finish, but obstruction was spotted in the build-up and the score ruled out.

Both teams continued to try and move the ball around, but an offside call against Gloucester on the half hour gave Farrell a chance to restore the

lead for his team and the England fly-half made no mistake with his penalty.

With half-time approaching, Saracens tried to turn the screw although Liam Williams seemed to escape censure when he hit Freddie Clarke in the air as the Gloucester back-rower tried to catch a high ball.

Gloucester were competing well but were hit by a body blow on the stroke of half-time as Alex Lozowski made a key break and found Owen Farrell in support, the fly-half going under the posts and converting his own try.

22-12 the half-time score, the ten point margin really not doing Gloucester any justice. They'd gone toe to toe with the Men in Black in the first 40 minutes and deserved to be more in touch at half-time after a determined effort.

However, the Cherry and Whites started the second half in the worst possible way. Attacking from near their own line, Andy Symons lost the ball in contact and Brad Barritt gathered to pop the ball to Juan Figallo to crash over. There seemed to be a knock-on by Barritt but the TMO decreed it wasn't obvious and Farrell converted for 29-12.

All the refereeing calls at the breakdown were now going the way of the home side, but Farrell missed the opportunity to extend the lead on 47 minutes when his penalty attempt hit the right hand upright.

Indiscipline continued to haunt Gloucester though and, with advantage being played for a high tackle, Maro Itoje crashed over from close range on 48 minutes.

The home side were now starting to run riot as Gloucester started to slip off a few tackles. Jackson Wray broke through to leave the defensive line in tatters and numbers on the right saw Chris Wyles dot down for a popular score with the home crowd, Farrell's conversion making it 41-12.

Time ticked on and Gloucester were unable to break the shackles, a combination of handling errors and penalties conceded preventing them from getting out of their own half, let alone threatening to add to their points tally.

Jeremy Thrush saw yellow on 68 minutes as the penalty count continued to mount against the Cherry and Whites and, minus the second row, Gloucester conceded a penalty try after a series of decisions against them five metres out.

Seeking two more tries to clinch at least a try scoring bonus point, a rare foray into Saracens' territory threatened a score, but the ball was turned over and Ben Spencer finished off a counter-attack, before the same player finished off another long range move on the stroke of full-time to give the final score a lop-sided 66-12 outcome.

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