

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

THURSDAY, AUGUST 23, 2018

KINGSHOLM – PRE-SEASON

**GLOUCESTER COMPLETE PRE-SEASON IN STYLE WITH IMPRESSIVE
WIN OVER DRAGONS**

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 40 DRAGONS 31

Gloucester Rugby showed some tantalising glimpses of what they're capable of in Thursday evening's preseason victory over the Dragons, emerging 40-31 winners in an entertaining encounter.

At times, the Cherry and Whites played some scintillating stuff and threatened to run riot as only the slippery conditions put a halt to some threatening moves. Even so, Gloucester were able to run in six tries on the night.

With it being the final preseason run out, the changes started to be made at half-time and that opened the door at times for the Dragons and, to be fair to the visitors, they made the most of their chances to make it a competitive game.

Importantly, Gloucester closed out the win, took a good look at most of their squad and appear to have come through it all injury free. But the really serious stuff starts next weekend at home to Northampton, and given the atmosphere at Kingsholm in front of just shy of 10,000 supporters, it should be a great occasion.

There had been some rain in the build-up to the game and, although conditions were bright come kick-off time, the pitch looked slick and the ball a little greasy.

And a handling error led to the game's first try. Gloucester conceded a penalty having lost territory, Dragons went to the corner and, although the catch and drive was held, the ball was shipped wide where full-back Jordan Williams slipped a tackle to score.

The home backs almost responded at once, clean lineout ball seeing Matt Banahan pop up in midfield before freeing Jason Woodward who fended off one tackler before being hauled down just short.

Gloucester were penalised for holding on in the tackle, but it only delayed the home team's first try. Danny Cipriani pulled the strings and his flat pass put Matt Banahan over in the right-hand corner. Billy Twelvetrees converted from the touchline for a 7-5 lead after 11 minutes.

And Cipriani was involved again for the second try, spotting space on the blindside for Banahan who outpaced the cover before drawing the last man and passing inside for Woodward to canter home. Twelvetrees added another excellent conversion for 14-5.

The fly-half was then denied a try as Thorley broke down the left. The ball went loose and Cipriani hacked on but pulled back a defender as both chased the loose ball, Cipriani then touching down to no avail.

The Cherry and Whites continued to play with great ambition, but the ball was still proving tricky to grasp and several handling errors halted promising moves. Referee Foley was quite rightly not letting anything go, and a penalty chance for Dragons' Josh Lewis was squandered on the half hour.

But the Dragons finished the first half well, using their big ball carriers to good effect around the fringes. However, it was a nice show and go from [Lewis], albeit with a hint of a block, that split the defence with the fly-half sliding over and converting his own try to narrow the gap to 14-12.

There was still time for the Cherry and Whites to respond as indiscipline from the Dragons set up a five metre lineout chance. The catch and drive was patiently executed and James Hanson claimed the score. Twelvetrees converted in fine style once more for a 21-12 half-time lead.

Gloucester were good value for the lead, having scored three excellent tries. They'd possibly played with more ambition than was prudent given the conditions, but they were certainly trying to make things on.

The Dragons were making a game of it, there was real physicality in their defence and referee Tom Foley looked to be officiating as if it were a Premiership game – exactly the right approach with the season opener against Northampton Saints next weekend.

HALF TIME:

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 21-12 DRAGONS

Gloucester made a host of changes at half-time, but it didn't affect their momentum. Twelvetrees made a couple of powerful surges, Braley almost sniped his way over but it was replacement hooker Franco Marais who touched down from close range. 26-12 after 44 minutes.

The Cherry and Whites were starting to express themselves with Jason Woodward showing some sublime skills. The full-back almost pirouetted his way clear but it was Mariano Galarza who finished from a metre out. Twelvetrees added the extras.

More changes came but Gloucester still poured forward, and a powerful catch and drive left the referee with no option other than to award a penalty try as the Dragons pulled the maul down illegally. The lead was now 40 points to 12.

Credit to the Dragons, they were still competing hard and struck next with a well-worked try, the blindside well exploited and Dafydd Howells touching down. Gavin Henson added a nice conversion.

The visitors then scored their fourth try as a catch and drive set up a close-range position from which Tiaan Loots crashed over. Henson converted again and the gap was now down to 40-26.

With both sides having made multiple changes, the final quarter saw a number of handling mistakes from both sides although you couldn't question their desire to play an expansive game.

The Dragons did have the final words as Rhodri Morgan squeezed over in the corner to make the final score 40-31, but it was Gloucester's night and a good workout before the Gallagher Premiership opener against Northampton Saints at Kingsholm next Saturday (kick off 2pm).

FULL TIME:

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 40-31 DRAGONS

Gloucester Rugby:

15. Jason Woodward; 14. Matt Banahan, 13. Henry Trinder, 12. Billy Twelvetrees, 11. Ollie Thorley; 10. Danny Cipriani, 9. Willi Heinz (capt); 1. Josh Hohneck, 2. James Hanson, 3. Fraser Balmain; 4. Ed Slater, 5. Mariano Galarza; 6. Ruan Ackermann, 7. Lewis Ludlow, 8. Ben Morgan

Replacements:

Franco Marais, Alex Seville, Ciaran Knight, Gerbrandt Grobler, Jake Polledri, Ben Vellacott, Lloyd Evans, Henry Purdy, Todd Gleave, Freddie Clarke, Will Safe, Gareth Evans, Callum Braley, Owen Williams, Mark Atkinson, Charlie Sharples, Tom Hudson

TRIES: Banahan, Woodward, Hanson, Marais, Galarza, Penalty Try

CONVERSIONS: Twelvetrees (4), Penalty Try

PENALTIES:

Dragons:

15. Jordan Williams; 14. Dafydd Howells, 13. Tyler Morgan, 12. Jarryd Sage, 11. Hallam Amos; 10. Josh Lewis, 9. Rhodri Williams; 1. Ryan Bevington, 2. Richard Hibbard, 3. Leon Brown; 4. Brandon Nansen, 5. Cory Hill (capt); 6. Huw Taylor, 7. Aaron Wainwright, 8. Lewis Evans

Replacements:

Elliott Dee, Brok Harris, Lloyd Fairbrother, Joe Davies, Nic Cudd, Tavis Knoyle, Gavin Henson, Tiaan Loots, Matthew Screech, James Benjamin, Adam Warren, George Gasson, Joe Goodchild, Will Talbot-Davies

TRIES: Williams J, Lewis, Howells, Loots

CONVERSIONS: Lewis, Henson (2)

PENALTIES:

JC