

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2018

RECREATION GROUND – GALLAGHER PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

LATE DRAMA AT THE REC AS BANAHAN TRY SECURES DRAW
AT BATH FOR GLOUCESTER RUGBY

BATH RUGBY 31 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 31

Billy Twelvetrees held his nerve to convert Matt Banahan's late try as Gloucester Rugby secured a 31-31 Gallagher Premiership draw having seen a 0-21 first half lead evaporate courtesy of a ferocious second-half comeback by Bath Rugby.

It was a game that certainly offered value for money and would have enthralled the neutral. For supporters of either side involved, it was an emotional rollercoaster.

It was the proverbial game of two halves. Once again, Gloucester Rugby showed tantalizing glimpses of what they're capable of when they're at their best, soaking up home pressure before exploding for three converted tries.

However, the game swung either side of half time as tries from Rokodoguni and Dunn got Bath back within striking range at 14-21.

Gloucester Rugby looked to have regrouped but a Rhys Priestland inspired comeback saw the home team seemingly time a later swoop to perfection as Elliott Stooke's late try saw Bath ease in front by 31 points to 24.

There was little time left on the clock, but the Cherry and Whites showed great character and no little composure to create one last scoring chance.

The rugby gods had obviously decreed that said chance would fall to Matt Banahan, returning to the Rec for the first time. The big man slid over to get Gloucester Rugby back to within two points, and Billy Twelvetrees showed nerves of steel to slot the conversion and earn a draw.

Mixed feelings certainly. Three scores to the good, Gloucester Rugby looked odds on for the win. However, you have to give credit to Bath for the way they fought back. Similarly, the Cherry and Whites showed real mettle to dig deep and level matters.

Seven points from two games thus far for Gloucester Rugby. Not bad; could easily have been better. But there are so many positives and next Friday's local derby against Bristol Bears is a mouthwatering prospect.

It was a promising start on the day for Gloucester Rugby, Danny Cipriani testing the Bath defence with a neat chip over the top which he gathered himself to lift the travelling supporters.

The home side conceded a penalty which Cipriani kicked to the corner to apply the pressure but a free kick to Bath at the next scrum allowed Bath to clear and move into the Gloucester Rugby half.

A good spell followed for the home side as they gave the Gloucester Rugby a good workout. There was the odd alarm, but the Cherry and Whites held firm. Of more concern was a late hit on Cipriani which left the fly-half needing treatment before continuing.

But the fly-half dusted himself off and inspired Gloucester Rugby's first try. His cunning grubber split the defence and Matt Banahan came close to scoring against his former side. The Cherry and Whites stayed patient near the line and, eventually Ruan Ackermann forced his way over. Twelvetrees converted for a 0-7 lead but Cipriani departed for an HIA.

It was ferocious stuff as the game went into the second quarter, Bath throwing everything into attack in a bid to get back into the game.

But Gloucester Rugby's defence was committed and survived until Cipriani's return.

And Cipriani promptly conjured up another piece of magic as Gloucester Rugby weathered the storm and extended their lead. His lovely delayed pass sent Ruan Ackermann flying through a gap from 30 metres out and the flanker carried the final two defenders over the line with him as he scored his second of the afternoon. Twelvetrees added the extras for 0-14 on 27 minutes.

As things stood, the only negative was seeing Val Rapava Ruskin leave the fray, but Callum Braley quickly lifted the spirits as he spun out of a tackle a couple of metres out after more good work from the pack to dot the ball down on the line. The conversion from Twelvetrees made it 0-21 on 35 minutes.

Bath needed a response badly and got it on the stroke of half-time. Gloucester Rugby withstood some fierce pressure near their own line, but were outflanked on the right as a long pass found Rokodoguni and the winger went over in the corner. Burns converted from the touchline for 7-21 at the interval.

The last minute notwithstanding, it had been a good first half for the Cherry and Whites. They'd soaked up a lot of pressure but very much made the most of their chances when they came.

The try on the stroke of half-time would have been a real morale booster for Bath, and a second half fightback was to be expected. Could Gloucester Rugby cope with the expected onslaught?

And a second Bath try came almost straightaway, courtesy of two Gloucester Rugby errors. A misplaced Banahan pass gifted possession to Bath and Cipriani had to make a tremendous cover tackle on Brew. But the resulting lineout was overthrown and Tom Dunn gathered to score. Burns' conversion narrowed the gap to 14-21.

Bath now well and truly had their tails up, and Gloucester Rugby didn't help themselves with some unnecessary backchat after a penalty was awarded against them to concede vital territory and more terrific defence was required to keep Henry Thomas out at the corner.

Neither team could quite get the upper hand in the following exchanges and, as the hour mark approached, there was a worrying delay as Charlie Sharples stayed down after a tackle. Great care was taken of the winger before he was stretchered off to sympathetic applause.

However, another Gloucester Rugby error then led to Bath leveling the scores. A turnover allowed Priestland to kick downfield for Rokodoguni to gather. The defence got back but, several phases later, Tom Dunn burrowed over for his second and Priestland converted for 21-21.

Jason Woodward then produced a moment of magic as he collected a kick downfield and weaved his way back into the Bath 22. Bath conceded a penalty at the breakdown and Twelvetrees restored Gloucester Rugby's lead at 21-24 with 10 minutes left to play.

But the drama still wasn't over. Priestland hung the restart high and Rokodoguni leapt high to claim it. The Cherry and Whites were forced to concede a penalty as the hosts poured through and Priestland's penalty leveled the scores again.

Worse was to follow. Gloucester Rugby conceded a penalty on halfway and Priestland drilled it to the corner. Once again the Cherry and Whites held out for several phases, but the ball was eventually shipped wide for Tom Ellis to go over in the corner. Priestland converted for 31-24.

Unbelievably, there was still time for more action. Gloucester poured forward, almost in desperation, It was helter-skelter stuff but they kept their composure and executed well as they moved into the Bath 22.

The script was written, the ball found Matt Banahan and the winger dived over before handing the ball over to Billy Twelvetrees who showed admirable nerve to kick the game-tying conversion.