

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2018**

**ALLIANZ PARK – GALLAGHER PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY SECOND BEST IN DISAPPOINTING DEFEAT  
AT SARACENS**

**SARACENS 38 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 15**

Gloucester Rugby tasted defeat for the first time in the Gallagher Premiership this season, Saracens showing the clinical edge and power that characterises their current status as champions in a comfortable 38-15 victory on Sunday afternoon.

It was a tough afternoon at Allianz Park on Sunday afternoon as Gloucester Rugby, by their own admission, fell short of the standards that they're capable of and which they aspire to.

Their hopes on the day weren't helped by the losses to injury of Ruan Ackermann and Lewis Ludlow just before half-time but, in truth, more damaging were the errors that undermined the first half performance.

In the first half in particular, playing into a stiff breeze, Gloucester Rugby played themselves into good positions only to lose the ball in contact or simply knock on.

The home side were also particularly streetwise at the breakdown and employed a suffocating defensive system which prevented the Cherry and Whites getting over the gain line when they did secure decent possession.

Saracens were also very successful at holding on to the ball in the second half when Gloucester Rugby did have the wind at their backs; classic tactics in the conditions and very well executed.

The Cherry and Whites did show some defiance as time ticked on, and finally broke through for late tries from Atkinson and Sharples but it was too little, too late.

Plenty to think about and work on for Gloucester Rugby this week, with Harlequins the visitors to Kingsholm next Saturday (kick off 3pm).

The opening few minutes were a kicking duel, and it quickly became apparent that Gloucester Rugby were playing into the wind. And it was first blood to Saracens as Owen Farrell kicked a fourth minute penalty as Jake Polledri was penalised for not releasing after fielding a high kick.

And the lead was quickly extended as Saracens struck from first phase. Sean Maitland came into the line off his wing, made the break and drew the last man for David Strettle to stroll home. Farrell added a fine conversion for 10-0 after seven minutes.

Gloucester Rugby spent the next few minutes trying to make a dent in the home defence, but they had no joy making any inroads despite going through multiple phases and were eventually penalised for holding on in the tackle.

The Cherry and Whites finally made some good yardage as a floated Danny Cipriani pass put Jason Woodward in space, and the full-back duly beat a couple of men on the left. Matt Banahan was screaming for an inside pass but Woodward couldn't free his arms in the tackle.

A catch and drive from a rolling maul five metres out then came close, and Charlie Sharples nearly went over in the opposite corner, brought down a fine tackle from Liam Williams, when Gloucester Rugby moved the ball wide as Cipriani again made good use of possession.

The home side then benefitted from a huge slice of luck. Gloucester Rugby had been defending bravely when a high up and under from Farrell bounced off the crossbar straight to the lurking Maro Itoje who had only to flop over the line to score. Farrell converted for 17-0.

The Cherry and Whites were trying everything in their power to get something before half-time, but on too many occasions they were stripped in the tackle or knocked on when well placed. And the line speed from the home defence was stopping the Gloucester Rugby back line from clicking into gear.

However, Gloucester Rugby did get some reward for their efforts on 36 minutes when the pack won a scrum penalty and then executed a neat lineout move. The home team killed the ball and Billy Twelvetrees kicked the penalty.

The Cherry and Whites badly needed to hold out until half-time, and were dealt a real blow when both Ruan Ackermann and Lewis Ludlow were forced off injured after the same phase of play, Freddie Clarke and Ben Morgan replacing them.

As Gloucester Rugby regrouped, Saracens, showing the predatory instinct that has won them so many games in recent years, unleashed a powerful catch and drive from close range before Maro Itoje muscled his way over. Farrell almost inevitably added the conversion for a 24-3 half-time lead.

Much would now depend on how the Cherry and Whites could respond with the wind at their backs in the second half.

A monumental effort would be required to get anything from this game against a Saracens side who appeared to be operating well within their comfort zone.

Gloucester Rugby did their best to battle back into the game after the resumption, but just couldn't make any headway against the suffocating Saracens defence. There was plenty of possession but no penetration.

And Saracens duly achieved what Gloucester Rugby were unable to do in the first half in moving downfield against the wind and coming away with points.

The home side were aided by a string of refereeing decisions going their way, but they ground their way, phase by phase, deep into the Gloucester Rugby 22 before Sean Maitland was put through a gap and sprinted clear for the bonus point try. Farrell converted and it was 31-3 on 55 minutes.

Several replacements were used on both sides, and the intensity seemed to drop a bit as a result. But Gloucester Rugby were lucky to escape when Christopher Tolofua almost added a fifth try but was penalised for a double movement.

The Cherry and Whites tried to show some defiance, Tom Hudson making one good break from deep. But possession was turned over and the home side promptly moved the ball wide, resulting a try for Alex Lozowski. Farrell had no issues with the conversion.

Gloucester Rugby finally broke through on 72 minutes, Ben Vellacott taking a quick tap which led to Mark Atkinson dummying his way clear to score, but Twelvetrees' conversion hit the post to sum up his team's fortunes on the day.

The Cherry and Whites kept going right until the very last whistle, and Charlie Sharples finished well on the left after a good spell of pressure. Twelvetrees converted from the touchline and some pride had been restored, but there was plenty to contemplate on the long drive home.

JC