

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2018

THOMOND PARK – HEINEIKEN CHAMPIONS CUP

14-MAN GLOUCESTER RUGBY BATTLE BRAVELY
BUT ARE GROUND DOWN BY RELENTLESS MUNSTER

MUNSTER RUGBY 36 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 22

Taking on Munster at Thomond Park was always going to be a tall order, but Gloucester Rugby had to play almost the entire match with 14 men as a yellow and red card deprived them of numbers and allowed a ruthless home side to take full advantage on their way to a 36-22 win.

The cards, without any shadow of a doubt, changed the course of the game. Savage's, the yellow, came at a time when the Cherry and Whites were well and truly in the game, battling to try and gain an upper hand in what was a real arm wrestle.

The red card to Cipriani, left Gloucester Rugby playing for the best part of an hour with only 14 men on the pitch. After that, the Cherry and Whites were always going to be up against it.

Followers of Munster will point out that they also received two cards. However, the difference was that theirs came on 75 and 80 minutes. The outcome was effectively decided by that point.

In the circumstances, the spirit showed by the Gloucester Rugby has to be commended. It would have been so easy to capitulate and finish on the end of a real hiding. However, the Cherry and Whites kept on battling and even threatened to score a try scoring bonus point towards the end of the game. It was a brave response.

However, despite that pride in the jersey, the overall feeling is one of disappointment. The first quarter of the game hinted at a really close tussle being on the cards. Sadly, things didn't work out that way.

On the day, there was an early chance to test the Munster defence as the home team failed to collect the kick-off but, despite several phases of possession and some quick ball from the breakdown, the red line held firm.

Neither team could gain the upper hand in the opening exchanges, both lost a lineout on their own throw, both seemed to get the nudge at a set scrum. It was competitive stuff with little to choose between the two teams and very physical up front.

The Cherry and Whites did show their ambition by opting to kick for the corner on 15 minutes. A well-set catch and drive looked to be going over the line, but was halted illegally and the subsequent rolling maul was also kept out.

Gloucester Rugby were then dealt a blow as Tom Savage was yellow carded for an illegal clear out at a ruck on Dan Goggin. The Munster centre certainly made the most of it, gesticulating furiously towards the Assistant Referee but it looked a very harsh call.

The Cherry and Whites were now a man light, the home crowd were into the game and Munster had their backs up. Suddenly, there was a spring in their step and a period of pressure in the 22 eventually saw an overlap created on the right and Mike Haley went over for a 5-0 lead on 21 minutes.

A series of harsh calls against Gloucester Rugby had led up to the score and Franco Marais had to be replaced by Henry Walker, but finally a decision went the way of the Cherry and Whites and Danny Cipriani nailed an excellent long-range penalty to narrow the gap to 5-3 after 24 minutes.

However, the game then swung well and truly the way of Munster. Danny Cipriani was adjudged to have led with the shoulder going into a tackle on Rory Scannell and, after consultation with the TMO was red carded. To rub salt into the wound, Joey Carbery kicked the resulting penalty.

Contact looked minimal, Cipriani was barely in the vicinity and Scannell seemed to run into the top of his arm, but the Cherry and Whites were now up against it without their playmaker.

Gloucester Rugby were now being penalised at seemingly every collision, Rapava Ruskin and Twelvetrees were next to fall foul of referee Ruiz's whistle and the latter was probably lucky to escape with just a lecture.

And the home side were ruthless as they capitalised on the momentum. The penalty was kicked to the corner, and the catch and drive powered over for a try from hooker Rhys Marshall. Carbery converted for 15-3 after 36 minutes.

The Cherry and Whites dug deep to prevent any further damage on the scoreboard before half-time but, once the whistle blew, Gloucester Rugby could only reflect upon how a promising start to the game had unraveled.

It wasn't from any lack of effort or courage, they'd simply fallen foul of the officiating, something you can't afford to do at Thomond Park against Munster, and it was going to take a monumental effort to get back on terms.

And the second half started ominously as Tom Marshall tried to break down the right, was tackled into touch and got up gingerly. Tom Hudson was immediately sent on to replace him.

And Hudson was immediately called into the action as he won the chase to touch down a kick through from Tadgh Beirne, the second row breaking clear as he romped onto what looked like a clear forward pass but which was missed by the officials.

Beirne then also escaped with what seemed to be a block on a Gloucester Rugby defender, as Munster poured forward with the decisions continuing to go the way of the home team.

It just gifted territory to Munster and they needed no second invitation. A powerful platform up front gave the backs all the time and space they needed against a back line down in numbers, and it came as no surprise when Joey Carbery glided home, converting his own try for 21-3 after 52 minutes.

The cracks were starting to appear now as the disparity in numbers was starting to take its toll. Gloucester Rugby could find no room to move in attack, whereas Munster always seemed to have a man over and replacement Sammy Arnold stepped his way over for the bonus point try on 55 minutes, Carbery adding the extras for a 29-3 lead.

The Cherry and Whites kept battling and finally got some reward as replacement lock Gerbrandt Grobler touched down from close range, Twelvetrees converting, but the home team hit back quickly as wing Andrew Conway went over untouched as Munster again took advantage of the extra man.

Jason Woodward went over on the left after good hands by Twelvetrees and Banahan as Gloucester Rugby sought to restore some pride, before Munster got away with countless penalties in the red zone before Sammy Arnold was finally yellow carded for a deliberate knock on.

The Cherry and Whites kept plugging away, and Ben Morgan crashed over from close range, Twelvetrees adding the conversion via a drop goal to narrow the gap to 36-22.

With just a couple of minutes to go, thought suddenly turned to an unlikely try scoring bonus point. And Gloucester Rugby duly gave it a go as they ran the ball from deep. Munster replacement prop Stephen Archer was yellow carded, but the home team forced a turnover to end Gloucester Rugby's hopes.