

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2018

KINGSHOLM – PREMIERSHIP RUGBY CUP

**LAST GASP GLOUCESTER RUGBY SNATCH DRAMATIC 14-12 WIN
OVER SAINTS**

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 14 NORTHAMPTON SAINTS 12

It looked like being a deeply frustrating evening at Kingsholm but Gerbrandt Grobler burrowed over for a last ditch try, converted by Billy Twelvetrees, to earn the Cherry and Whites a nervous 14-12 Premiership Rugby Cup win over Saints on Friday evening.

Just as it looked as though the visitors were going to hang on for a significant victory after spending much of the second half defending their own line, Grobler's late drive and Twelvetrees' cool head snatched the win for the Cherry and Whites.

It was tense right until the very end. Despite the claims of the home forwards that the try had been scored, referee Greg Macdonald insisted that he had the best view and it was no score. However, the TMO intervened and the replays showed that the try was good.

It was tough on the Saints who had defended manfully after Cobus Reinach had scored a fine try at the start of the second half to edge his side in front. It was a moment of quality in a game full of errors and unfortunate not to earn his side the victory.

But Gloucester Rugby kept plugging away, even when it looked as though it wasn't going to be their day, and the win was reward for sheer persistence if nothing else. The win helps to keep the Cherry and Whites just behind Northampton in the pool table, but the Premiership Rugby Cup takes a back seat for now as the Gallagher Premiership returns next week with Leicester Tigers the visitors to Kingsholm.

Hopefully, the conditions will be better, and the opposition will be a similarly tough proposition, but Gloucester Rugby supporters won't give a jot if their team sneak another narrow win.

Weather conditions were pretty testing as the game kicked off, rain was falling steadily and a strong wind was blowing from the Stowford Press Stand End towards the West Terrace.

And it was Saints who started the better as their kicking game benefitted from the elements behind them. A neat inside pass allowed full-back George Furbank to slice through the midfield before offloading to Piers Francis who slid over to open the scoring after five minutes.

James Grayson hooked the conversion wide, and then did likewise with a very kickable penalty on 11 minutes as Gloucester Rugby struggled to come to terms with both the conditions and the referee's interpretation of events on the field.

It was all Saints at this stage as the visitors dominated possession, and the Cherry and Whites were having to defend bravely in their own 22 with any clearance kick failing to make any great distance.

Little had gone Gloucester Rugby's way in the opening quarter, but they suddenly benefitted from a huge stroke of luck. Cobus Reinach's pass was disrupted by Billy Twelvetrees, but it was Grayson who threw a speculative pass that was read perfectly by Matt Banahan who intercepted to score.

Referee Macdonald was unsure whether Twelvetrees was offside at the ruck or had knocked on, but the TMO ruled in Gloucester Rugby's favour and the try stood. Twelvetrees added the conversion for 7-5 after 22 minutes.

Saints were then dealt a blow. They had already lost Piers Francis to a blood injury and, on 23 minutes, hooker Mike Haywood limped off to be replaced by James Fish.

The rain continued to fall, but Gloucester Rugby looked to have weathered the storm as they finally started to get their hands on the ball. The scrum was starting to get on top, but it was not retreating 10 metres from a quick tap that saw Saints prop Paul Hill sinbinned on 31 minutes.

The Cherry and Whites then spurned a glorious chance to extend the lead. Jason Woodward made a superb break but was caught just short of the line. The ball was then switched left but Henry Trinder's pass died on Ollie Thorley and the winger knocked on with Saints at sixes and sevens.

Conditions were continuing to play havoc with the game. Ball handling was difficult and throwing into the lineout nigh on impossible. It was a testing night for both teams and half time came with no further scores for either side.

It had been a fully committed effort by both teams, but it was tough going. Only a handful of meaningful handling moves had been executed, and there had been set pieces galore as a result of so many handling errors.

However, Gloucester Rugby would probably be the happier of the two sides given that they held the lead, had created a few more decent scoring opportunities and would now play with the wind at their backs.

But the Saints came out and stunned the Cherry and Whites at the start of the second half. Cobus Reinach fielded a high kick on his own 22, linked well with Tom Collins down the right and then won the chase to touch down his own kick ahead. James Grayson added a good conversion for 7-12.

It was a blow for the Cherry and Whites who tried to respond at once, unleashing two promising catch and drives which had Saints at full stretch in defence. A five metre scrum also brought no reward.

Time ticked on and, as Gloucester Rugby's frustration grew, so did Saints' confidence in their own defence. The Kingsholm faithful grew restless with little sign of a breakthrough in evidence.

The game went into the final few minutes and still Saints held out. It was a valiant rearguard action. But there was one last twist in the tale.

With no time left on the clock, and a penalty advantage being played, the Cherry and White forwards drove towards the line. They leapt up as a group, convinced they had scored but the referee was of a different opinion.

However, in stepped the TMO and, as the replays were shown on the big screens, the Kingsholm crowd saw ball touch line and the score was awarded as the stadium erupted in a mixture of joy and relief.

Billy Twelvetrees still had the challenge of kicking the conversion to win the game, but kept his cool and Gloucester Rugby had snatched a win from the jaws of defeat.

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