

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2018**

**SANDY PARK – GALLAGHER PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY BATTLE BRAVELY  
BUT CHIEFS EXPLOIT ERRORS TO TAKE THE WIN**

**EXETER CHIEFS 23 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 6**

A deeply frustrating afternoon at Sandy Park, as Gloucester Rugby gave it everything against the Chiefs, their efforts not being truly reflected on the scoreboard as the home team made the most of a couple of key errors on their way to a 23-6 Gallagher Premiership victory.

It was an encounter when there genuinely didn't seem to be too much to choose between the two sides, and some Gloucester Rugby followers will wonder how their team is leaving Sandy Park with nothing to show for their endeavours.

In fact, for half an hour, the Cherry and Whites had achieved what very [few] teams do when they come here in that they'd pretty much stopped the Chiefs in their tracks and quietened down the home crowd a bit.

However, a couple of small but key errors then crept into the Gloucester Rugby game and it offered the Chiefs the slightest opportunity to get back into the game, and the home side needed no second invitation.

Nic White's try, superbly executed though it was, followed a lineout error. Alex Cuthbert's interception try early in the second half was a body blow. At that point, the Chiefs were where they like to be – in front and with the opposition chasing the game.

Gloucester Rugby did battle to try and get back into the match. Indeed, they created some promising scoring positions in the home 22.

However, they didn't capitalise in the face of some excellent defence and the Chiefs were able to close out the win.

Frustrating, but Gloucester Rugby will be able to take positives from the game. Against most other sides, they would have got some reward for their efforts. Not today, though.

The challenge now is to bounce back for next weekend's local derby against Worcester at Kingsholm. It's a game of fine margins. The Cherry and Whites were on the wrong side of them today, hopefully next week will be a different matter.

After a tentative opening from both sides, Gloucester Rugby took an early lead from a Danny Cipriani penalty as the Chiefs were penalised for not rolling away from the tackle area, the fly-half bisecting the posts from near halfway.

It was a lively opening from the Cherry and Whites who were flying into the tackles in the early stages, forcing a couple of uncharacteristic knock-ons from the home side allowing them to enjoy good possession.

The Gloucester Rugby defence was almost caught napping by a quickly taken Chiefs lineout, Gareth Steenson seeking to inspire a home attack, only for Fraser Balmain to pop up with a vital interception.

And the Cherry and Whites made the most of the let off, as Phil Dollman spilled an up and under, it was picked up in an offside position and Cipriani doubled the lead with his second penalty after 13 minutes.

Gloucester Rugby kept up the pressure, the pack winning a morale-boosting scrum penalty a couple of minutes later but Cipriani was just wide of the mark on this occasion as the home crowd started to voice its disapproval with things not going their way.

However, the Chiefs finally started to get their hands on some ball and started to play their possession game.

The Gloucester Rugby tackling was solid but, as play entered their 22, a penalty was conceded and Steenson made it 3-6 after 24 minutes.

One area of concern for the Cherry and Whites was that they were turning the ball over in contact on occasion, and one such error led to the home side piling on the pressure in the 22, but the defence was superb and forced a key penalty to clear their lines.

But the home team broke through on 33 minutes. Advantage was being played for a scrum penalty when Steenson found Santiago Cordero with a perfectly-weighted cross kick. The winger took it on the run before finding Nic White with the inside pass and the scrum-half slid over. Steenson converted for 10-6.

It was now a question of Gloucester Rugby re-grouping and they went into half-time with no further scoreboard action, trailing by 10 points to 6.

It had been a decent first 40 minutes, and slightly frustrating to be behind at the interval. The Cherry and Whites had stopped Exeter really getting into their stride, although the game's only try had been beautifully executed.

But there had been enough about Gloucester Rugby's play in the first half to suggest that they could get something out of this game, particularly if they could cut down on the errors with ball in hand.

Indeed, Gloucester Rugby started the second half in promising fashion, Ollie Thorley bringing back memories of last week as he broke down the left. But, as the ball was recycled, Danny Cipriani's pass was picked off by Alex Cuthbert just outside the 22 and the winger just had the legs to run it back all the way. Steenson's conversion opened up a 17-6 lead.

The Cherry and Whites sought to hit back immediately, but were held out by some rugged Exeter defence. Then they were caught in possession trying to run out from their own half, held on in the tackle and Steenson made no mistake with the penalty for a 20-6 lead.

Gloucester Rugby continued to drive forward in a bid to get back into the game. Several times they worked good positions in the Chiefs 22, but came away empty-handed every time as time ticked on.

The Cherry and Whites were now, almost in desperation, trying to play from deep against a very good defence and very nearly paid a price for their ambition, Elvis Taione only halted by a fine tackle by Callum Braley as he powered for the line after a knock-on.

But the Chiefs weren't going to fail to come away with points and, after a period of pressure during which Gloucester Rugby defended their line with real spirit, the home team settled for a penalty from Steenson and a 23-6 advantage.

Even a consolation score eluded the Cherry and Whites as they knocked on near the Exeter line in the final minute, leaving everyone wondering what might have been.

JC