

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2018

SANDY PARK – HEINEKEN CHAMPIONS CUP

GLOUCESTER RUGBY STUN THE CHIEFS WITH SUPERB 27-19 WIN

EXETER CHIEFS 19 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 27

Gloucester Rugby kept their Heineken Champions Cup hopes alive with a famous win at Sandy Park on Saturday, clinching a hard-fought but well-deserved victory over the Exeter Chiefs by 27 points to 19.

Unlike a fortnight ago here at the same venue, the Cherry and Whites were able to build upon a promising first half performance; Gloucester Rugby were able to complete the job this afternoon and come away with the four points.

The performance was based on a phenomenal effort up front and in defence. The changeable weather conditions meant that expansive rugby was hard to execute for large parts of the day, it was a time for pragmatism and Gloucester Rugby delivered on that front.

In fact, at times it was a very Exeter-like performance, especially in the second-half when the Cherry and Whites kept things tight and made sure that they came away with points when they visited the home 22.

It's a victory that takes Gloucester Rugby to the top of the pool for the time being, and nicely sets up next weekend's return fixture. If the feat can be repeated at home, the Cherry and Whites will be well and truly in the mix when the final two rounds come around,

For now though, it's a job only half done and that will be the message around the training ground in the build-up to next week.

Gloucester Rugby were dealt a blow in the warm ups before the game, when replacement prop Val Rapava Ruskin went down injured. Alex Seville replaced him on the bench, the value of taking a spare front row forward on an away trip paying off.

It was an inauspicious beginning as the game kicked off in slightly bizarre weather conditions, bright sunshine but steady rain falling and the Sandy Park Ops team wisely hedged their bets and turned on the floodlights.

After a relatively even start, the Chiefs took a 7th minute lead from their first real attack of the game. The initial inroads were made down the right, Santiago Cordero jinking inside dangerously, but the ball was swiftly transferred left where Don Armand had the strength to make the line.

The Chiefs dominated possession for the next few minutes, but the Cherry and Whites hit them with a sucker punch on 15 minutes. Ollie Thorley fielded a kick through on his own 22, spotted a gap and set off. Alex Cuthbert just about tracked him down, but Willi Heinz was in support to take the offload and score. Cipriani converted for 5-7.

At this point, the rain arrived and the wind picked up with a vengeance. It was going to be an arm wrestle from this point on, and any kick in the air suddenly became a lottery, a couple from both teams drifting out on the full having started well infield.

Gloucester Rugby had half chances; Willi Heinz made a sharp break as he pounced on an errant Chiefs lineout throw, and a five metre lineout came to nothing as the home team defended the driving maul well. Owen Williams was also short and wide with a penalty attempt from well inside his own half.

But Gloucester Rugby extended their lead as half-time approached, another poor home lineout providing the possession, but it was a powerful scrum effort that earned the penalty and Cipriani had no problem making it 5-10 at the interval.

It had been a fascinating first half, and the Cherry and Whites were good value for their advantage. They had once again, largely due to some brave defence, stopped the Chiefs from getting their fabled possession-orientated game going.

Conditions weren't great, and Cipriani and Heinz were sensibly kicking more than they would probably like. But the odd scoring chance was being created and, crucially, Thorley's scintillating break resulted in points. The second half was set up to be a cracker. Could the Cherry and Whites withstand the inevitable Exeter onslaught?

And the home side duly hit back within two minutes. They stripped possession from the restart, but the score itself was a soft one really, scrum-half Nic White spotting a gap in the fringe defence around a ruck and scampering home from the 22. Steenson converted for 12-10.

Credit to the Cherry and Whites, they hit straight back to regain the lead. Some quick recycling around the ruck area didn't let the Exeter defence settle and a penalty followed. Cipriani held his nerve to slot the penalty for a 12-13 lead.

The game entered an attritional phase, and the Chiefs made several changes. Neither team could quite gain the upper hand as the tension started to grow. The rain had abated, but ball handling was still tricky and the error count was high.

But the Cherry and Whites stayed patient as the ball[sic] went into the final quarter, kept the ball through numerous phases and finally pounced. Ollie Thorley again popped up with a key break, but it was Jaco Visagie who marked his full debut by burrowing over from close range. Cipriani added an important conversion for 12-20.

And Gloucester Rugby stunned the home crowd ten minutes later, as they laid siege to the Exeter line, putting faith in their catch and drive technique, softening up the Chiefs before Ben Morgan broke off to spin out of a tackle to go over in the corner. Twelvetrees converted for 12-27.

The home side weren't done, however, forcing two quick penalties at set scrums to set up a five metre lineout. The execution was spot on and the try was awarded to replacement Tom Lawday. Steenson converted to narrow the gap to 19-27.

There was little time left though, and the visitors were forced to fling the ball around in their own 22 in a bid to try and get a losing bonus point. Gloucester Rugby's defence was up to the task though, and the game was closed out without any undue alarm.

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