

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2018**

**KINGSHOLM – HEINEKEN CHAMPIONS CUP**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY BATTLE BRAVELY BUT CHIEFS  
TAKE EUROPEAN SPOILS AT KINGSHOLM**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 17 EXETER CHIEFS 29**

A week after the impressive win at Sandy Park, Gloucester Rugby couldn't repeat the dose at Kingsholm on Friday evening, the Exeter Chiefs dominating possession throughout to grind out a 17-29 Heineken Champions Cup victory.

The final score-line is perhaps slightly harsh on the Cherry and Whites. With just a couple of minutes to go, they were still very much in the game at 17-22, attacking from deep within their own 22.

However, an ambitious chip over the top fell into Exeter hands, the Chiefs pounced for their bonus point try and denied Gloucester Rugby a losing bonus point.

It was tough to take, but this group prides itself on backing its own and, had the ball bounced the other way, Kingsholm might have been celebrating a famous win.

As it was, this game was almost the complete opposite of the meeting between the same two teams at Sandy Park only six days earlier. On that occasion, Gloucester Rugby were clean in terms of their discipline, hardly giving away any penalties.

This evening saw the Cherry and Whites fall foul of the referee throughout, and gifting a team like Exeter is only going to result in trouble. The visitors duly exerted a stranglehold on the game and deprived Gloucester Rugby of possession for long periods.

For all that and, even when it looked as though Exeter were simply going to close the game out in the second half, the Cherry and Whites refused to throw in the towel and kept battling into the final few minutes when they could have conceivably snatched a dramatic win.

As it is, it's Exeter who keep their faint Heineken Champions Cup hopes alive while Gloucester Rugby look ahead to the long trip north next weekend to take on Newcastle Falcons when the Gallagher Premiership resumes.

The opening few minutes were predictably conservative, both teams box-kicking frequently and the ball rarely making it past first receiver as the game tried to settle into something resembling a pattern.

The Chiefs actually enjoyed the lion's share of possession in the opening 10 minutes or so, but the Gloucester Rugby defence was looking solid and repelled everything that was thrown at it.

The Cherry and Whites' first offence came courtesy of a well-set catch and drive from a few metres out, but the Exeter defence dug in and forced a knock-on when the ball was moved wide.

But the visitors threatened when Sam Hill slipped a tackle in midfield to get behind the defence and a penalty was conceded for offside. Exeter kicked the penalty to the corner; however, a terrific lineout steal ended the immediate threat.

But indiscipline was allowing Exeter to set up camp in the home 22, and the pressure eventually told on 22 minutes. The Chiefs went to the corner again, and this time a try resulted for Sam Skinner. Steenson converted via the left hand upright for a 0-7 lead.

The Cherry and Whites had an immediate chance to reply in kind as Danny Cipriani kicked a penalty deep into the Exeter 22 but, with preventing clear release, Franco Mostert was penalised for an illegal clear-out.

But the home team were quickly back in the red zone and, although the forwards were just held out, space was available out wide and Jaco Visagie's long pass put Jason Woodward over to narrow the gap to 5-7 on the half hour.

The pendulum then swung back the way of the Chiefs as they pounced on a turnover on halfway, a chip ahead forcing Danny Cipriani to carry over his own line and concede a 5 metre scrum.

The home pack conceded a penalty at the first scrum, but held firm at the second. Exeter thought they'd powered over from the next phase of play, but the TMO could see no clear grounding.

But Gloucester Rugby just couldn't gain possession or get away from their own line. Exeter went to their tried and tested pick and go, grinding their way closer inch by inch and, eventually, Don Armand made the line. Steenson converted for 5-14 at half-time.

Having conceded the possession and field position via a knock-on was frustrating but, perhaps a bigger blow in the build-up was the sight of Danny Cipriani being led from the field of play, his injury status uncertain at this point.

On the balance of play, Exeter probably deserved the lead. It had been a story of taking chances – the Chiefs had come away with a couple of hard-earned tries while the Cherry and Whites had only scored one from three close range catch and drives.

It would be a real challenge from here on in to claw back the Chiefs, a team built to defend a lead. But Gloucester Rugby had firepower in their ranks, the challenge was to get hold of the ball to unleash it.

But Gloucester Rugby were dealt another blow right at the start of the second half. Santiago Cordero's dancing feet made vital yardage, before Sam Lawday came close and Billy Twelvetrees was yellow carded for killing the ball.

The Cherry and Whites were under the pump, but defended their line magnificently, first forcing a knock-on, then clearing downfield and winning a penalty through aggressive work at the ruck.

Twelvetrees returned from the sinbin, but Gloucester Rugby were immediately penalised at a set scrum in their 22 and Gareth Steenson took the easy penalty on offer for a 5-17 lead after 56 minutes.

But the Cherry and Whites kept plugging away, and finally got their reward on 65 minutes. It was a long patient build-up, but space was finally created on the left and Ollie Thorley put Jason Woodward over in the corner and narrowed the deficit to 10-17.

Willi Heinz then inspired a thrilling breakout from near his own line, wriggling out of a tackle before linking with Ollie Thorley. But, as the ball was kept alive and moved right, a knock-on ended the attack.

And that seemed to be just about it for Gloucester Rugby's challenge on the night. Josh Hohneck was yellow carded at the subsequent scrum, and the visitors twisted the knife as they went back to the catch and drive and went over for a try from hooker Jack Yeandle.

It looked to be all over. However, the Cherry and Whites responded with a stunning score from Tom Hudson, who finished well after a break from Freddie Clarke split the Chiefs defence asunder.

Suddenly, with their team back in the game, the Kingsholm crowd was buzzing. Could their team do it?

Unfortunately, Gloucester Rugby received the kick off deep in their own 22 and it was going to take something special to go the length of the field. Owen Williams' dink over the top was an attempt to pull a rabbit out of the hat, but Chiefs gathered and Harry Williams went over from close range shortly afterwards.

It was a cruel way to finish the game. Exeter had dominated long periods, but Gloucester Rugby had shown such spirit that they really deserved something out of the game. Sadly, it wasn't to be.

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