

# GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2018

KINGSTON PARK – GALLAGHER PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

GLOUCESTER RUGBY BATTLE THEIR WAY TO VITAL WIN AWAY  
AT NEWCASTLE

NEWCASTLE FALCONS 17 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 20

Tries from Ed Slater and Ben Morgan were enough for Gloucester Rugby to earn a vital Gallagher Premiership victory on the road at Newcastle Falcons on Saturday[*sic*], Billy Twelvetrees' late penalty clinching a 17-20 win.

Kingston Park is always a tricky venue to win at, and Newcastle are always a redoubtable opponent. And a Falcons side scrapping for their Premiership lives at the foot of the table are an even tougher proposition.

So, for the Cherry and Whites to battle back from a seven point deficit midway through the second half is a significant achievement.

At that point, it looked as though the Falcons had taken the game by the scruff of the neck having trailed at half-time. Eleven unanswered points seemed to have Gloucester Rugby rocking and a home win looked the likely outcome.

However, the Cherry and Whites dug deep and scrapped their way back into contention. Ben Morgan's try, converted by Billy Twelvetrees levelled the scores, before the centre slotted a tricky penalty to earn a late 17-20 lead.

Even then, Gloucester Rugby had to dig deep in defence to keep the home team at bay. Discipline had to be good; tackling had to be even better.

But there was to be no denying Gloucester Rugby on the day. It wasn't pretty on the day, but a win is a win and four Gallagher Premiership points have been safely secured as the battle for a play-off spot continues.

Next up are Sale Sharks at Kingsholm next Sunday. A big crowd will be present for that one, and backing up today's win is incredibly important.

In pretty decent conditions at Kingston Park, there was the predictable opening period of kick tennis as both teams settled into the game. Both scrum-halves were utilising the box kick regularly and both back threes were worked hard.

Despite the dry conditions, both teams were guilty of more handling errors than they would like and the respective defences prevented any significant line breaks.

However, Gloucester Rugby took a sixth minute lead when Billy Twelvetrees knocked over a long-range penalty as Newcastle failed to roll away from the tackle area.

Frustratingly, the Cherry and Whites couldn't build upon the lead and a number of handling errors and misfires at the lineout area allowed Newcastle to get a foothold in the game.

The Gloucester Rugby pack had to defend a close-range Newcastle lineout superbly, but a turnover followed, then a penalty and Sonatane Takulua levelled the scores with a penalty on 17 minutes and then gave his team a 6-3 lead on 29 minutes.

Things were still very much in the balance, and neither team was really executing in the way they would like but Gloucester Rugby swooped on the stroke of half time.

A mass scuffle resulted in Gary Graham being penalised and Owen Williams kicked to the corner. The forwards took it on from there, attacking the line in a very Exeter-like fashion before Ed Slater steamed onto a pop pass and went over under the posts. Twelvetrees converted for a 6-10 half-time lead.

Very little to choose between the two teams at half-time, and the game was still very much in the balance. The next score would be crucial. If Gloucester Rugby could get it, their position would look all the more promising.

However, that plan went straight out of the window as Newcastle came out fired up and quickly took the lead. It was a disappointing score to concede; a loose kick allowed the Falcons to attack the five metre channel and Takulua put Goneva away to score and put Newcastle in front 11-10.

The home team now had their tails up, and Gloucester Rugby's discipline started to slip. Newcastle didn't really offer anything threatening in attack, but Takulua was able to extend the lead with two penalties.

Things looked ominous for the Cherry and Whites. They hadn't really fired any shots in the second half, and the home team and home crowd seemed to have their tails up.

However, fresh legs were introduced off the bench and suddenly Gloucester Rugby had a new lease of life. Finally, possession was gained and held on to, and a patiently worked attack resulted in Ben Morgan forcing his way over from close range. Twelvetrees converted to level the scores.

It was now almost a case of who would blink first. Both teams made mistakes but, crucially, the Cherry and Whites spent more time in the Newcastle half and finally a penalty came. It wasn't easy, but Twelvetrees bisected the posts.

There was still time for the home team to respond, and they maintained possession well after normal time had expired. But Gloucester Rugby held firm and will head home with the points – that long drive won't seem quite so long!