

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2018

KINGSHOLM – GALLAGHER PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY END 2018 ON A LOSING NOTE
AS SALE TAKE THE SPOILS AT KINGSHOLM**

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 15 SALE SHARKS 30

Gloucester Rugby couldn't build upon a promising start on Saturday, as a well-drilled and physical Sale outfit dominated the game either side of half-time on their way to a 15-30 Gallagher Premiership victory.

In front of an expectant sell-out crowd, the Cherry and Whites had one of those afternoons when very little went right. They dominated possession according to the stats while Sale made twice as many tackles on the day.

However, it was all about taking chances and the Sharks gave the home side a lesson in that respect on Saturday afternoon, much to the frustration of the Kingsholm crowd. On several occasions in both halves, Gloucester Rugby spurned good attacking positions in the Sale 22. In contrast, Sale were clinical.

There was also the frustrating feeling after the game, that Sale hadn't had to work too hard for their points. At least ten of their points in the first half came from Gloucester Rugby errors; at least one try in the second came from a turnover.

Despite the good start which yielded a 10-0 lead, post-match reaction admitted that Gloucester Rugby had not been at their best. There was plenty of effort, but there were simply too many errors.

It was a missed opportunity to really take an iron grip on a top four spot. The win at Newcastle last weekend had opened up a bit of a gap. That buffer was eaten into a little bit today.

But the beauty of the format of this season, is that you don't have to wait too long to get an opportunity to put things right. Leicester away next weekend is a massive challenge, but it's one that has to be embraced.

The Cherry and Whites started brightly on the day, but missed a great opportunity in the opening two minutes as they won a penalty for a high tackle on Jaco Kriel and kicked to the corner. However, the lineout was overthrown and the chance was gone.

The opening few minutes were full of needle, a scuffle broke out after that first lineout and an incident in front of the Shed had the home crowd incensed, but drew no action from the officials.

Gloucester Rugby were enjoying the lion's share of possession in the opening stages and, although Sale held up well in defence, Billy Twelvetrees opened the scoring with an 8th minute penalty.

The Cherry and Whites kept up the pressure as Sale's discipline allowed some easy territorial gains. Good ball retention in the Sale 22 drew in the defence and Charlie Sharples put Jaco Visagie [in] for the game's first try. Twelvetrees added an excellent conversion for a 10-0 lead.

However, the visitors hit straight back. Byron McGuigan took a high ball and evaded the chase to make good ground. Swiftly recycled ball saw the ball shifted right, and Chris Ashton was able to use an unmarked man outside him to dummy his way over. Du Preez converted well.

It was a good spell for the Sharks, who were finally starting to enjoy some decent possession and the half back duo of de Klerk and du Preez were beginning to make an impact and test the home defence.

And it was de Klerk who gave his team the lead on the half hour.

Gloucester Rugby lost their own lineout on halfway, giving Sale good attacking ball. Ashton made the key break before James O'Connor found de Klerk who juggled the ball briefly before touching down. Du Preez converted for a 10-14 lead after 31 minutes.

And another lost lineout allowed the Sharks to extend the lead on the stroke of half-time. Failing to roll away from the tackle area was the offence, and du Preez gave Sale a 10-17 lead at the interval.

After a good start, the visitors had responded well and were probably good value for their advantage at the break. Gloucester Rugby would look back on a couple of promising visits to the Sale 22 when they had come away without points, whereas the visitors had shown a clinical edge.

Also of concern was the set-piece. The scrum had gone well, but several lineouts had gone astray and at least 10 of the Sale points had come from these misfires. The home team would have to tighten up in the second half.

Neither team could really gain the upper hand at the start of the second half, but Sale were dealt a blow on 46 minutes when Faf de Klerk was sinbinned for a deliberate knock-on. It gave the Cherry and Whites a good attacking position, but a couple of handling errors allowed Sale an easy exit.

This was compounded as Franco Mostert nicked lineout possession, but the ball was lost on the deck. Sale drove on, Lewis Ludlow was yellow carded for stripping the ball on the floor and du Preez made it 10-20 with the penalty.

Worse was to follow as Gloucester Rugby were penalised at a ruck. Sale went to the corner, threw a short lineout to the front and Rob Webber was awarded the try as the Sale pack drove over. Trailing 10-25, Gloucester Rugby were now well and truly up against it.

But Sale struck next to clinch the try scoring bonus point. Faf de Klerk nailed Billy Twelvetrees with a hit that looked borderline legal to the naked eye, the ball was jarred loose and Sale shipped the ball out for Denny Solomona to score on the right.

The Kingsholm crowd was swift to voice its displeasure but referee Ridley was heard on the ref mic to say that he saw nothing wrong with it.

The Cherry and Whites kept going until the end, and finally got some reward for their efforts as a close range catch and drive resulted in a 73rd minute try for Matt Banahan. But the conversion, which would have kept alive hopes of a losing bonus point hit the post and stayed out. It was that kind of day...

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