

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, JANUARY 11, 2019

KINGSHOLM – HEINEKEN CHAMPIONS CUP

**MUNSTER RUTHLESSLY EXPLOIT GLOUCESTER RUGBY ERRORS
ON WAY TO IMPRESSIVE EUROPEAN WIN**

GLOUCESTER 15 MUNSTER 41

Gloucester Rugby gave it everything in Friday evening's Heineken Champions Cup fixture at home to Munster, but the visitors showed a clinical, ruthless edge as they took full advantage of a number of errors by the home team on their way to a 15-41 victory.

The final score-line doesn't really do Gloucester Rugby and their efforts justice, but sees their European hopes for 2018-19 come to an end with one round left to play.

It was an evening which showed perhaps the difference between a team that has competed at the highest level in Europe every year for so many years, compared to Gloucester Rugby who are back in the Champions Cup after an absence of several seasons.

Certainly, Munster showed a calm precision in finishing off the chances that came their way whereas the Cherry and Whites had to work oh so hard for their tries.

Head Coach Johan Ackermann made the point when speaking to the media after the game that his side had been their own worst enemies. It was certainly difficult to disagree with him, particularly based on the first half, when the visitors capitalised on some basic errors by the home side.

In the second half, the Cherry and Whites to their credit battled their way to a couple of hard-earned scores. But Munster promptly hit back with scores of their own. It was tough to watch.

In front of a sell-out home crowd, it all added up to an incredibly disappointing evening for players and supporters alike. The atmosphere at Kingsholm was crackling and the team will be frustrated not to do it justice.

A trip to France next weekend to take on Castres will bring this season's European odyssey to an end for the Cherry and Whites. The French will be looking for revenge after losing at Kingsholm in round one, and it remains to be seen as to whether Gloucester Rugby will rotate their squad.

Overall, Europe this season has been a learning experience, and Gloucester Rugby have shown, when they're at their best, that they can compete with the best.

But it's all about doing it consistently, and that's the challenge for the Cherry and Whites. On Friday evening, despite glimpses of real quality and undoubted 100% commitment, they came up short on that front.

It was a thrilling start as Danny Cipriani got play underway, kicking short, and Kingsholm erupted as Gerbrandt Grobler plucked the ball out of the air and steamed into the Munster 22.

The visitors conceded a penalty which was kicked to the corner, but Munster held the hosts out. It was a breathless start, but perhaps set the tone as the Cherry and Whites came away with nothing from a promising position.

Gloucester Rugby were guilty of some unfortunate unforced errors in the opening exchanges, two high kicks were spilled to allow Munster to move upfield with a couple of easy territorial gains, but good defence retrieved the situation.

The opening 10 minutes were played at a furious pace, but that was leading to mistakes from both sides. But it was Gloucester Rugby who struck first, Billy Twelvetrees slotting a long-range penalty after 14 minutes as Munster played the ball illegally in a ruck.

It had been a promising start for Gloucester Rugby, but Munster served notice of their threat as an intelligent kick from Joey Carbery bounced wickedly in the home 22 and Ollie Thorley did well to deal with it.

It led to a good spell for the visitors, who patiently probed their way along the home 22 until, eventually, forcing a penalty which Carbery landed to level the scores at 3-3 after 20 minutes.

Another dropped high ball, followed by a scrum penalty then led to Munster's first try. Again, the build-up was slow and patient, progress made a metre at a time until a gap opened up at first receiver and Joey Carbery ghosted his way over before converting his own try for 3-10 after 25 minutes.

All the intangibles seemed to be going the way of the visitors and Carbery extended the lead two minutes later with a long-range penalty as Gloucester Rugby were penalised for holding on in the tackle.

There were certainly some debatable refereeing calls angering the Kingsholm faithful at this point. Franco Mostert was seemingly manhandled in a lineout without anything being given and a clear Munster knock-on shortly afterwards was ignored.

When Gloucester Rugby were penalised at the next scrum, and skipper Ben Morgan lectured by referee Romain Poite, the home crowd howled in indignation.

The Cherry and Whites looked to have made it to half-time without any further damage, but Munster kept grinding away with no time left on the clock until centre Rory Scanell broke a tackle and forced his way over. It was a real blow after some brave defence and Carbery's conversion made it 3-20 at half-time.

There was plenty of endeavour in everything Gloucester Rugby were doing, but they were simply making too many unforced errors which was allowing Munster to take an iron grip on the game.

With so much easy possession, and with so many 50/50 decisions going their way, the visitors needed no second invitation and went about their business with a cold, ruthless efficiency seen so many times before in European competition.

The Cherry and Whites would need to show similar efficiency if they were to have any way of fighting their way back into the game. Allowing Munster to continue to dominate in the way they had in the first half was only going to see more of the same.

Gloucester Rugby did come out with a renewed energy in the second half, and enjoyed their best spell of possession of the match in the Munster 22. The visitors conceded several penalties, but their defensive line remained impressively intact.

But the Cherry and Whites kept plugging away, the forwards working their way through countless phases near the Munster line. The visitors defence was incredible as was their desire to defend their line.

But finally the ball was moved wide via a long pass from Cipriani and Ollie Thorley flew over to score. The conversion attempt agonisingly hit the post and stayed out, but Kingsholm finally had something to cheer about.

However, Gloucester Rugby failed to clear their lines from the restart, and all the good work put in for Thorley's try was promptly undone. Munster showed a clinical edge near the line as they worked an opening and Keith Earls smuggled his way over in the corner, Carbery converting from the touchline.

Worse could have followed, but Munster had a try chalked off, Andrew Conway beating Tom Hudson in a foot race as the winger kicked ahead, but there had been a forward pass leading up to that point and play came back.

But the Cherry and Whites continued to show real heart, again laying siege to the Munster line. This time the score came a little quicker, although it was still hard earned, as Fraser Balmain went over from close range. Twelvetees added the conversion to make it 15-27.

Again Munster responded impressively. The excellent Carbery slid through a grubber off his left foot and Conway was in the clear to gather the bouncing ball and secure the try scoring bonus point. Carbery converted for 15-34.

Carbery then rubbed salt into some already raw wounds as he picked off an errant pass and ran it all the way back for Munster's fifth try, his conversion a formality.

This final score gave the scoreboard a somewhat lopsided look, and certainly didn't reflect Gloucester Rugby's commitment. But it did show how Munster had pounced when necessary and taken their opportunities.

On the night, it was a painful lesson but, if taken on board the right way, and if it leads to Gloucester Rugby consistently performing at the levels shown by the likes of Munster then it may well be a bitter pill worth swallowing.

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