

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2019

RECREATION GROUND – PREMIERSHIP RUGBY CUP

BATH RUGBY 52 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 0

A young Gloucester Rugby team battled bravely against a strong Bath Rugby outfit at the Rec on Monday evening, but the home team had just too much strength and knowhow and, despite some spirited play from the Cherry and Whites, eased to a 52-0 Premiership Rugby Cup victory.

It was always going to be a tough gig for a young Gloucester Rugby outfit as they took on a very strong Bath line-up, but the final score-line doesn't really reflect the effort the Cherry and Whites put in on the night.

There were two phases of this game, in the periods before and after half-time, when the young team more than held their own, but Bath showed their skill and experience when they were in the ascendancy and clinically took their chances.

It was a tough end to Gloucester Rugby's participation in the Premiership Rugby[sic] this season, but they can look back on good wins over Wasps and Northampton Saints as well as having given valuable game time to a number of their promising young Academy prospects.

The tournament has been positioned as a development competition, and Gloucester Rugby have certainly embraced that concept. The younger players who have featured will have benefitted from the experience.

There were some positives despite the score-line, as a number of players who were making their comebacks from injury came through OK.

The fight and spirit of the side also couldn't be faulted. They could easily have capitulated when they fell behind early on, but they hung tough.

But, on Monday evening, Bath were simply too smart and strong. They dominated the key moments and exploited their chances. It was a chastening experience but one that the Cherry and Whites will learn from.

There is no game next weekend, but there will be plenty of hard work over the next week and a half before Gloucester Rugby entertain Exeter Chiefs at Kingsholm on Friday 15 February.

The injury list is easing for the Cherry and Whites and it will be a massive game for both sides.

Bath got off to a great start on Monday night as they quickly identified a mismatch on the blindside, Semesa Rokodoguni up against two forwards. The winger needed no second invitation as he turned on the afterburners on the outside, went outside the final man and scored in the corner. Priestland converted off the post for a 7-0 lead.

Matt Banahan then thought he'd scored once again at the Rec in Gloucester Rugby colours as he pounced upon a floated pass to intercept and set off for the line, but play came back for offside in the backs.

The home side proceeded to spend the next few minutes in the Gloucester Rugby 22, but the Cherry and White defence was spirited and in no mood to cave in. The set piece was under some pressure though, and Priestland was able to extend the lead with a 14th minute penalty.

And Bath quickly moved further clear. Gloucester Rugby lost their own lineout possession and Bath didn't waste the opportunity. A grubber kick got the home team in behind the defensive line and Ruaridh McConnochie had the pace to sprint clear and score. Priestland had an easy conversion for 17-0.

The young Gloucester Rugby side dug deep, and enjoyed a decent spell of possession in the minutes that followed. They created a couple of good attacking positions, but couldn't take advantage and Bath were able to clear.

The Cherry and Whites were certainly making a decent fist of it, and came close to opening their account but Bath held firm and, almost inevitably, turned over possession and moved downfield to score. The driving lineout was the tactic and hooker Jack Walker touched down. Priestland converted off the post once again for a 24-0 half time lead.

It was a disappointing end to the half for Gloucester Rugby who had arguably dominated the previous 20 minutes, and to concede after coming so close to scoring themselves was a blow to morale.

However, there had been some encouraging signs from the young Gloucester Rugby side who had bounced back well after a tough opening quarter. Bath may have thought at one point that they could indulge in some Barbarians style rugby, but the ferocity of the Cherry and White defence had forced them into some tactical kicking.

The Cherry and Whites introduced a completely new front row at half time, as well as centre Jack Reeves, but Paddy McAllister was the one who caught the eye with some great ball carries in a lung-bursting first phase of play which lasted a good six minutes without a stoppage.

In fact, Gloucester Rugby enjoyed a good quarter of an hour, but were unable to find the key to unlock the Bath defence. And, having soaked up some pressure, the home team suddenly went through the gears and started to ease further clear as the visitors tired.

Rokodoguni went over in the corner as a juggled ball in midfield perhaps froze the Gloucester Rugby defence a bit and allowed the winger an unopposed run in.

A long pass from Freddie Burns then put Tom Homer over, the former Gloucester Rugby fly-half dipping into his box of tricks, including chips over and through the defence, as he exploited the fatigued Cherry and Whites.

But still Gloucester Rugby battled and, with the likes of Charlie Chaplin and Cam Terry injecting some pace to their game, threw everything into the quest for a consolation score.

However, an interception in the Bath 22, eventually led to a hat-trick for Rokodoguni and the England winger added a fourth on the stroke of full-time.

JC