

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2019

KINGSHOLM – GALLAGHER PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY DELIGHT KINGSHOLM CROWD
WITH VICTORY OVER SARACENS**

GLOUCESTER RUGBY 30 SARACENS 24

Two tries from Ben Morgan paved the way for Gloucester Rugby to complete two impressive Gallagher Premiership wins in a row as they powered to a 30-24 victory over Saracens on Friday evening.

The score-line genuinely does not do justice to Gloucester Rugby's physical dominance on the night. The Cherry and Whites had the upper hand throughout, and only two tries in the last two minutes secured a losing bonus point for the visitors.

That will frustrate Gloucester Rugby, but it will also give them something to work on this week as they prepare for the local derby at Bristol Rugby. The wins over Exeter and Saracens will count for little if they're not backed up at Ashton Gate next week.

But the back to back home wins show what the squad is capable of when they hit their straps. Exeter and Saracens were both missing international stars, but they both possess strength in depth and both were tough nuts to crack.

But, on Friday evening at Kingsholm, Gloucester Rugby took the game to Saracens and dominated proceedings. It was an impressive performance and sent the home crowd off into the night in good spirits.

That tremendous home crowd got behind Gloucester Rugby 100% on the night, conditions were near perfect and the Kingsholm faithful enthusiastically greeted their team from the off.

The Cherry and Whites very nearly opened the scoring in the first minute, capitalising on a Saracens turnover in the away 22, but Tom Marshall couldn't quite hold on to the ball as he went for the corner.

Billy Twelvetrees was then just off target with a fifth minute penalty attempt as the Cherry and Whites kept up the pressure, but without having anything to show for their efforts. But the centre made amends three minutes later when the visitors were caught offside, giving his side a 3-0 lead.

However, Gloucester Rugby were penalised for the same offence on 12 minutes, only for Alex Lozowski to drag his very kickable penalty attempt wide of the left hand upright. The visitors dominated possession for the next few minutes, but the home defence was solid.

Having been starved of possession for so long, Gloucester Rugby then showed what they can do with ball in hand as a break from Tom Marshall almost put Ollie Thorley away, only for a despairing Saracens hand to get in the way.

But the Cherry and Whites stayed patient from the resulting lineout, before Ben Morgan showed great awareness to touch the ball against the base of the post for the game's first try. Twelvetrees added the easy conversion for 10-0 after 22 minutes.

The home team were looking on fine fettle at this point, Ben Morgan carrying with real purpose, and Billy Twelvetrees was able to extend the lead to 13-0 with a 27th minute penalty, only for Lozowski to respond in kind two minutes later.

Gloucester Rugby were calling the shots though, and a cute lineout move, followed by a tackle-bursting run from Jaco Kriel again took play towards the Saracens line. The visitors killed the ball near their own posts and Twelvetrees added his third penalty for a 16-3 lead.

No further scoring in the first half, but a Danny Cipriani kick did have the Saracens defence in difficulties only for the ball to bounce kindly for the visitors and allow them to clear.

But, overall, it had been a very good first 40 minutes for the Cherry and Whites who had largely dominated. There had been the odd spell of promise for the visitors, but they very much seemed to be missing their international contingent.

The next score would be crucial. If Gloucester Rugby could extend their lead, they would be very well set. But you can never count out Saracens.

And the Cherry and Whites immediately found themselves under pressure at the start of the second half as they couldn't secure the restart, but committed defence kept the visitors at bay.

Having survived the threat, Gloucester Rugby moved dangerously downfield and were held up over the line, not just once but three times with the Saracens defence at full stretch! The Kingsholm crowd groaned in frustration...

However, the Cherry and Whites didn't panic; they stayed patient and finally created the space for Ed Slater to take a short pass and crash over. Twelvetrees added the extras for a 23-3 lead.

The visitors made a host of replacements in a bid to get back in the game, and it paid dividends. A penalty kicked deep into the Gloucester Rugby 22 set up the field position and Michael Rhodes burrowed over from close range. Lozowski converted for 23-10.

With 20 minutes still to play, alarm bells may have started to jangle. But, once again, the Cherry and Whites stayed admirably calm before securing a crucial score.

Patient build-up play established great field position in the Saracens 22, the forwards earning their money with a series of muscular ball carries.

The visitors defended their line heroically, but they couldn't stop Ben Morgan from a metre out. Billy Twelvetrees converted for 30-10.

At this point, with the game seemingly in the bag, perhaps the Cherry and Whites switched off mentally a touch. There was no lack of effort, and Saracens certainly had to work hard to create the opening for Matt Gallagher to score wide out on the right.

But the desire to try and secure a try-scoring bonus point backfired in the last minute. The ball could have been kicked into touch, but was turned over and Jackson Wray took full advantage as he powered home for Saracens' third. Lozowski converted both to clinch the losing point with the final score 30-24 to Gloucester Rugby.

The final couple of minutes were a tad frustrating, but shouldn't take the gloss of a performance that was excellent overall and will mean that Gloucester Rugby fans have a good weekend!

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