

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

FRIDAY, MARCH 1, 2019

ASHTON GATE – GALLAGHER PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

GLOUCESTER RUGBY SLIP TO DISAPPOINTING DERBY DEFEAT
AGAINST BRISTOL BEARS

BRISTOL BEARS 28 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 24

Gloucester Rugby's recent winning run came to an end at Ashton Gate on Friday evening, a late penalty try and penalty earning a tense 28-24 Gallagher Premiership victory for Bristol Bears on Friday evening.

It was an evening when the Cherry and Whites, looking to build on wins over Exeter and Saracens, never really got going.

Part of that was down to the tenacious approach of the Bears, who were understandably fired up for the occasion and who succeeded in preventing the Cherry and Whites hitting their stride.

But more significant was the number of mistakes that the Cherry and Whites made on the night, whether it be handling errors or poor decisions made.

It's a blow to Gloucester Rugby's top four ambitions, and means that next weekend's trip to Harlequins takes on added importance. But, as Head Coach Johan Ackermann told the media afterwards, there are still enough games for Gloucester Rugby to have control of their own destiny.

The loss of Willi Heinz to injury early in the first half was also a blow, and the visitors might question some of the refereeing calls made against them, particularly in the second half when penalties conceded by the Bears near their line could have resulted in a card.

But let's take nothing away from Bristol who deserved the win on the night, taking full advantage of errors made by Gloucester Rugby and who created some good chances themselves. Bristol take ownership of the local bragging rights and the Rifles Cup.

In fact, the hosts got off to a storming start after just a couple of minutes as Gloucester Rugby made the fatal mistake of failing to find touch with a clearance. Charles Piutau ran it back, Luatua and Daniels showed good hands and former Kingsholm favourite Dan Thomas was over in the corner. 5-0 to Bristol.

The Cherry and Whites did their best to hit back immediately, moving the ball left and right with ambition. However, despite looking to have Bristol stretched a couple of times, there were no clear-cut chances.

It was a frustrating opening for Gloucester Rugby, and they nearly went further behind when Harry Thacker made a good line break in midfield, only for the scramble defence to get back and snuff out the threat.

But, finally, Gloucester Rugby strung some phases together and the first score came as a result. A strong run from Ruan Ackermann took play into the 22, but it was slick hands from Danny Cipriani that allowed Jason Woodward to get outside his man and glide over. Billy Twelvetrees nailed a fine conversion for 5-7.

However, Gloucester Rugby handed the initiative back to the home side as they failed to deal with a high kick, and then knocked on when trying to run out of their own 22. A penalty was then conceded at a scrum and Callum Sheedy's kick edged his team in front. 8-7 after 26 minutes.

Despite a powerful scrum that won a penalty as the Bristol pack were shoved off their own ball, little errors were slowing up Gloucester Rugby's momentum and the home crowd were enjoying getting behind their team, especially when Andy Uren nicked possession off Callum Braley to ruin good field position.

And the home team were certainly growing in confidence, Uren buzzing around directing operations and a period of pressure around the Gloucester Rugby 22 led to a second penalty for Sheedy and an 11-7 lead.

All the 50-50 calls were going against the Cherry and Whites at this stage, and the Ashton Gate crowd were loving it. Gloucester Rugby badly needed to make something happen as half-time approached.

But, despite a lineout deep in the home 22, nothing came from it and Gloucester Rugby were left to reflect on a 40 minutes when nothing much had happened for them.

Some of it had admittedly come from their own mistakes; 10 turnovers tells its own story. But the home team were definitely getting the rub of the green when it came to the intangibles. A big effort was going to be required after the resumption, especially having lost skipper Willi Heinz to injury.

The Cherry and Whites drew first blood in the second half. Having turned down one kick at goal, they didn't go for the corner again as Bristol conceded another penalty and Billy Twelvetrees took the three points on offer.

But, once again, a loose kick immediately undid the good work. Luke Morahan broke a tackle to split the defence and the home team kept the ball alive well for Andy Uren to slide over in the corner before Gloucester Rugby could re-group. Ian Madigan converted from the touchline for an 18-10 lead.

It was not looking like Gloucester Rugby's day. Jordan Crane knocked on in his own 22 to give the Cherry and Whites a glimmer of a chance but Tom Marshall was tackled into touch at the corner.

However, Marshall showed superb finishing skills to dot down in the corner after the Cherry and Whites turned down another kickable penalty. Twelvetrees converted magnificently from the touchline to make it a one point game.

Then came a massive stroke of luck. Gloucester Rugby won the ball in the air as they chased a high kick and Danny Cipriani spotted space downfield. Jason Woodward harassed Piutau into a mistake near his own line and Ollie Thorley was on hand to pick up and score. Twelvetrees converted again for 18-24.

The tide seemed to have turned, but back came the home side, applying the pressure in the Gloucester Rugby 22, and Jason Woodward was yellow carded for a deliberate knock on as the Bristol backs threatened.

It was a time for brave hearts in defence, but a couple of soft penalties went against Gloucester Rugby, one 'milked' by former Cherry and White Harry Randall as he threw a pass against a defender who was out of the play and trying not to get involved.

It gave Bristol great field position and the backs joined the pack to launch a catch and drive which resulted in Karl Dickson having no hesitation in awarding a penalty try. Ed Slater was yellow carded and Bristol led 25-24.

Down to 13 men, the Cherry and Whites responded with real spirit and forced a penalty at a scrum just outside the Bristol 22, only for Billy Twelvetrees' effort to slide agonisingly past the right hand upright.

Gloucester Rugby were then, somewhat harshly, penalised at a subsequent ruck and Ian Madigan rubbed salt into the wound by drilling the penalty home from long range for a 28-24 lead.

Restored to their full complement of players, there was one last chance for Gloucester Rugby as they forced a five metre lineout. They took the ball cleanly, but Bristol stopped the maul and prevented the ball emerging to clinch a famous win.