

# **GLOUCESTER RUGBY**

**SATURDAY, MAY 4, 2019**

**KINGSHOLM – GALLAGHER PREMIERSHIP RUGBY**

**GLOUCESTER RUGBY 28 NEWCASTLE FALCONS 19**

It was far from a classic performance from Gloucester Rugby at Kingsholm on Saturday, but the Cherry and Whites still had enough in the tank to secure a 28-19 Gallagher Premiership victory over Newcastle which secures a third place finish in the table.

It was a display that will leave the squad with plenty to work [on] as they prepare for their final regular season outing of the season, in a fortnight's time away at Sale. In particular, the lineout and first up tackling will probably be areas of focus in forthcoming training sessions.

And credit should be given to Newcastle who, staring down the barrel of relegation, gave it absolutely everything on the day, defending with a passion that occasionally spilled over into illegality and making life very, very difficult on the day for the Cherry and Whites.

In fact, for the majority of the second half, the visitors genuinely looked as though they could win the game, spending a huge amount of time in the Gloucester Rugby 22 and closing the deficit to just two points at one point.

But the pivotal moment saw one of Gloucester Rugby's most experienced campaigners, Matt Banahan, produce a vital contribution as he plucked an interception out of the air and ran it back from 60 metres to clip the Falcons' wings.

At that moment, Newcastle sensed that their goose was cooked. The Cherry and Whites finished on the front foot and it was credit to Dean Richards' side that they defended with such heart as the minutes of their Premiership existence ticked away.

Gloucester Rugby duly secure a third place finish, but still don't know who their semi-final opponent will be following Saracens' win over Exeter Chiefs. However, for the first time in eight years, they're in the knockout mix. Exciting times!

The Cherry and Whites kicked off with the wind at their backs on the day, and almost pounced early as Ed Slater charged down Michael Young's clearance kick, only for the Falcons to scramble back and recover.

Shortly afterwards, the Gloucester Rugby back line almost clicked into gear, Matt Banahan put into space by Danny Cipriani, but the cover defence just got back to thwart Charlie Sharples a couple of metres out. Their first score looked to be a matter of time.

However, it was the visitors who stunned Kingsholm by taking a ninth minute lead. Johnny Williams made the incisive break in midfield, before neat offloading out of the tackle kept the ball alive and Michael Young went over under the posts, Flood converting for a 0-7 lead.

Things hadn't quite clicked for the Cherry and Whites at this point, the lineout a struggle in particular, with Callum Braley having to deal with some loose ball and one five metre lineout being lost.

There was plenty of possession [in] the Newcastle 22 though, but the Falcons defence was physical and efficient. However, penalties were being conceded at a rate of knots and Toby Flood saw yellow on 21 minutes.

It gave the Cherry and Whites the numerical advantage they needed and, from a five metre scrum, they made it count as Cipriani put Jason Woodward over for Gloucester Rugby's first try. Billy Twelvetrees converted to level the scores at 7-7 after 24 minutes.

However, Newcastle promptly retook the lead.

A kick out on the full gave them great field position, the resulting catch and drive made good ground before Sinoti Sinoti broke off the back of the maul and wriggled his way over.

The seesaw nature of the game promptly continued as Newcastle obstructed Charlie Sharples as he chased the kick off. The kick went to the corner, and the pack drove it on before releasing for Danny Cipriani to glide over. Twelvetrees converted for a 14-12 lead.

Newcastle's indiscipline was really starting to hurt them, and Calum Green became the second Falcon to see yellow for a high tackle. The Cherry and Whites pounced, fashioning an opening for Sharples to go over on the right after nice hands from Ackermann. Twelvetrees converted superbly from the touchline for 21-12.

A fourth try almost followed as Mark Atkinson carved open the defence. Callum Braley was in support and looked set to score, but Gary Graham pulled off a magnificent last-ditch tackle.

Gloucester Rugby were then dealt a blow as Ed Slater left the field injured, Lewis Ludlow taking his place. But there was no further score as the Cherry and Whites went into half-time with a 21-12 lead.

It had been a breathless 40 minutes of rugby, with incident all over the pitch. Gloucester Rugby hadn't started well and would be frustrated by the scores they'd conceded which had given Newcastle self-belief.

However, the Cherry and Whites were looking dangerous in attack despite some spirited Newcastle tackling. That defence though wasn't always legal; the penalty count against the Falcons was high and the yellow cards had come as no surprise.

Gloucester Rugby now needed to close the game out in an efficient manner and not give Newcastle any easy territory or possession. A big final 40 minutes of rugby at Kingsholm this season lay ahead.

And the Falcons came out fired up after the resumption, a break from Calum Chick leading to a promising attacking position near the home line. A series of five metre scrums followed, as penalties were conceded and a warning was issued by referee Tom Foley before Lewis Ludlow was yellow carded.

It was a massive shift in defence for the Cherry and Whites, and it was all hands to the pumps, but they eventually forced a turnover in the shadow of their own posts.

However, although the ball was cleared, Newcastle were straight back into the 22 following a Gary Graham break. Another penalty was conceded, the catch and drive was good and George McGuigan claimed the try, Food converting to narrow the gap to 21-19 after 58 minutes.

The second half had been all Newcastle, and Gloucester Rugby badly needed a break. And it duly came from Matt Banahan. The Falcons were pouring forward in attack, but Nemani Nagusa's pass was picked off by the big winger who ran it back all the way for a vital score.

Twelvetrees added his fourth conversion of the day for a 28-19 lead which helped to settle the nerves and the Cherry and White spent the final few minutes of the game camped in the Newcastle 22 looking for a further try.

They turned down a kickable penalty which would have run down the clock, and nearly paid the price as they couldn't quite get over the line from a couple of five metre scrums, eventually turning the ball over.

But Newcastle couldn't capitalise and, perhaps fittingly, the game ended on an error and referee Tom Foley brought proceedings to a close.