

GLOUCESTER RUGBY

SATURDAY, MAY 25, 2019

ALLIANZ PARK – GALLAGHER PREMIERSHIP RUGBY

**SEASON ENDS ON DISAPPOINTING NOTE AS SARACENS PROVE
TOO STRONG IN SEMI-FINAL**

SARACENS 44 GLOUCESTER RUGBY 19

Gloucester Rugby's Gallagher Premiership hopes were ended at Allianz Park on Saturday afternoon, a first half aerial assault paving the way for Saracens to secure a place in next weekend's final following a 44-19 victory for the home side.

It was a day when little went right for the Cherry and Whites. Head Coach Johan Ackermann spoke after the game of all the 50/50s that had gone against his team.

But at the same time, he praised the opposition for their efficiency and ability to make the most of their opponent's mistakes.

It had all started so well with a try in the first couple of minutes. But Saracens slowly but surely took control of the game, utilising the box kick and kick chase to devastating effect. It was an area dominated by the home side and created the platform for victory.

For all that, Gloucester Rugby were competitive for much of the first half but saw the game slip away from them either side of half-time as Saracens ruthlessly took the game out of their reach.

No-one could question the team's heart. They kept battling right until the very end but, on the day, were simply up against a better team on the day, a side that executed more efficiently and forced crucial mistakes.

As for the support the team received – absolutely magnificent! The Gloucester Rugby faithful travelled en masse and helped to turn Allianz Park Cherry and White. Even as things went awry on the pitch, they kept on backing their side as always.

The bitter taste of defeat is still fresh. It will be for a couple of days. But nothing should detract from the progress made this season. The challenge now is to use this campaign as a platform, to come back stronger and prevail in games of this magnitude in the future.

Good luck to Saracens in the final next week, they were worthy winners on the day. They continue to set the standards but everyone at Gloucester Rugby will be working hard to narrow the gap.

It was a dream start on the day for the Cherry and Whites as they made the most of early possession. A neat inside pass split the home defence, Tom Marshall and Jason Woodward combining to send Ben Morgan over in the corner. Billy Twelvetrees converted from the touchline for 0-7.

But the home team hit back quickly. Gloucester Rugby fatally left the restart bounce as they thought it was drifting out and Saracens swooped on the loose ball. Quick hands across the backs, a neat grubber behind Charlie Sharples and Sean Maitland gathered to score. Farrell couldn't convert.

It was frenetic stuff in the opening few minutes in the North London sunshine, with both teams mixing it up, moving the ball around when it looked on but also kicking well when it was more appropriate; Saracens often using the box kick to good effect.

And a high kick which went loose led to the home team edging in front on 15 minutes, as Gloucester Rugby knocked on and fielded the ball in an offside position. Farrell's penalty made it 8-7.

The little intangibles, were going the way of Saracens, several loose balls finding Saracens hands, but Farrell just missed extending the lead on 20 minutes as his penalty attempt struck the left hand upright and bounced clear.

The Cherry and Whites were dealt a blow though on 27 minutes as Ed Slater had to leave the field injured, Tom Savage entering the fray to ensure that just as much experience remained in the pack and he promptly stole a Saracens lineout.

It was a tough period for the Cherry and Whites though as they were starved of possession and the home team struck from nowhere. Maro Itoje suddenly burst clear from a breakdown when nothing looked on, carried into the 22 and put Ben Spencer over. Farrell converted for 15-7.

Gloucester Rugby looked to hit back immediately, and seemed to have carved open a glorious opening as Charlie Sharples came in off his wing, but his looped pass was picked off by Alex Goode with a try beckoning.

And the escape was compounded as Savage was penalised for playing the scrum-half at a ruck and Farrell's penalty opened up an 18-7 lead.

Worse was to follow as Saracens continued to send the ball skyward. The Cherry and Whites weren't coping well as the home team competed well in the air and it duly led to a second try.

Farrell's high cross kick was well won by Alex Lozowski, who stayed upright and offloaded to Liam Williams who dived over in the corner. Farrell couldn't convert but the home team were now well placed at 23-7.

No further scores before half-time, but Saracens took a serious advantage into the break as, despite the brightest of starts, the game had slipped away from the Cherry and Whites.

Saracens were playing into the breeze and their dominance was largely based upon their tactic of launching high kicks and competing well for the knock downs. It was working well and they weren't going away from it.

There had been a couple of good chances for Gloucester Rugby after they'd scored the game's first try. A five metre lineout was squandered, and Goode's intervention to snuff out the threat after Sharples' break was key.

To battle their way back into the game, the Cherry and Whites needed to find the key to unlock the home defence again, but it was proving to be pretty suffocating at this stage.

The next score was going to be key, and it went Saracens' way as, within a minute or so of the restart, Nick Tompkins marked his 100th appearance for the club with a fine try as he ghosted through untouched. Farrell converted for 30-7.

And the home team continued to try to pad their lead in the moments that followed, as a one penalty was awarded for not rolling away from the tackle area only for Farrell to drag his kick wide, and he repeated the dose shortly afterwards.

It proved to be a brief respite as Saracens somehow won possession at a ruck on their own 22, attacked from deep and the Cherry and Whites simply ran out of tacklers as Tompkins went over for his second. Farrell added the extras for 37-7.

The Cherry and Whites tried desperately to try and get something going but, under immense pressure, passes weren't going to hand and the home defence was swarming all over the field to close down any hint of space.

It was starting to look like a very tough afternoon at the office for Gloucester Rugby, and Alex Goode spun out of a tackle to establish a position near the line from which Nick Tompkins reached out to complete his hat-trick, Farrell converting for 44-7.

Gloucester Rugby did show some commendable spirit though, Woodward carrying powerfully into the home half before Ruan Dreyer showed great hands to dummy his way over and score.

Twelvetrees converted as Saracens, incredibly, tried to slow the game down as they walked slowly back for the restart.

And a third try followed shortly afterwards as they gave their magnificent travelling supporters something to shout about. A well-executed backs move saw Billy Twelvetrees make a half-break in midfield before offloading to Lewis Ludlow to power home.

There were other fleeting chances as time ticked away. But there was to be no further reward for the Cherry and Whites as their season drew to a brave but disappointing close.

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