

## **THE CITIZEN**

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 1923.**

RUGBY REFLECTIONS FROM W.B.'S NOTEBOOK.

BRILLIANT FOOTBALL AT OXFORD.

WONDERFUL TRIES IN FREE SCORING MATCH.

MILLINER'S SUCCESS AT SCRUM-HALF.

Gloucester suffered their second defeat of the season at Oxford on Thursday, when the invincible University team triumphed in a game, remarkable for its open character and free scoring, by 5 goals, 1 try (28 points) to 1 goal 2 tries (11 points). A seventeen points' defeat would suggest that Oxford's success was easily gained, but the scoring by no means indicated the run of the play. Territorially, Gloucester had rather more of the game; in the second half the City were on the attack for long periods, but missed several scores by narrow margins.

Where Oxford were superior was in the amazing speed of the back division, Jacob and Smith in particular. These two players obtained tries after brilliant runs from just outside the Gloucester 25, repeating earlier performances in the initial stages of the contest. Thus four of Oxford's scores were mainly individual, and I have not seen such tries recorded in any previous match in which Gloucester have been engaged.

It was a fascinating game to watch, and the Gloucester players said it was equally delightful to take part in. Mr. Freethy had to penalise the visitors several times in the first half for "four up in the scrum," but otherwise infringements were remarkably few. Both sides were out to play real Rugby, and the result was an exhibition worth going a long way to see.

Gloucester were beaten, but the City Club left behind at Oxford a reputation of which they may feel justly proud. The Oxford Fifteen as a whole did not reach the brilliance which characterised the efforts of the side which defeated the City two seasons ago by 33 points to 3, but the University possess a combination of speed merchants rarely seen in one team. With such an array of talent, the difficulty of the Dark Blue captain will be to select the best side.

Macpherson himself, injured against Newport on Monday, could not play against Gloucester, and Humphrey and Lawton (half-backs) and Wallace (three-quarter) and a couple of forwards also stood down. I can well understand Oxford could place two teams in the field fully capable of extending the strongest opposition. The victory over Newport – the first ever gained over the Usksiders – was the cause for great jubilation at Oxford. The Welshmen were beaten at their strongest point – forward – for the day was wet and back play was rather discounted.

Gloucester were unable to field full strength on Thursday, Daniell, Hughes, Coulson, and Collins all being unable to make the journey. Tom Voyce, too, was suffering with a damaged knee, and only decided to turn out at the last minute.

A sensational story had gone the round of the London Press that the International would not be fit for three months, but this rumour was discounted by his appearance at Oxford. All the same, I think Voyce was taking too big a risk in playing at Oxford, valuable as his services were required by the City. The one hope is that no ill-consequences will result to the injured knee.

The vacant positions at half-back were filled by F. Meadows and R. Milliner (Cinderford), and the success of this pair was one of the features of the match. I had not seen Milliner for some years, but on his form at Oxford he worthily sustained the excellent reports of his play that have reached me from the Forest. Behind a good heeling pack, Milliner displayed all the qualities needed for a scrum worker – a quick, accurate and well-timed service of passes, intelligent anticipation, and keen defence.

On the day the Cinderfordian outclassed his opponent (Macdonald), and I heard after the match that the Oxford captain passed the remark that he was the best scrum half seen on the University ground this season. This was a high complement, but well deserved.

And of Meadows! The Gloucester Second teamer has proved his versatility both at fly half and centre, and on Thursday he gave his best display for the City premiers. I cannot recall a single occasion when Meadows failed to accept a pass; he varied his tactics with skill and judgment, and started his three-quarters in some splendid movements. Had Gloucester possessed pace behind equal to their opponents the scoring would have been far heavier than it was.

At three-quarter, Millington and Sid Brown formed a strong left wing, and the latter had the distinction of scoring a couple of tries. He was well served by his captain, who, besides exhibiting cleverness in attack, did heaps of tackling. Millington, too, had hard lines in an attempt to drop a goal, the ball hitting the upright from a well-directed shot.

David did capital all-round work, and scored the other try after a pretty opening by Millington. Loveridge, who deputised for Daniell, was somewhat unnerved by the importance of the match, and failed to hold transfers with possible chances of scoring. Otherwise, however, he performed creditably, and put in one or two clever touch-finders with the left foot.

Forward, Gloucester put up a great fight. The Oxford pack – a fast, well-drilled set – were often dangerous in the open with hands and feet, but the City eight held a big advantage in the scrums, and got possession with a regularity that surprised the University men. The leader of the Oxford forwards was inquiring of Holford after the match "how it was done," and the old International proffered advice which no doubt will be put to good use in future engagements.

In out-of-touch play, too, Gloucester did admirably, Hall several times opening up cleverly from the long lines. In the second half the Dark Blue forwards were badly worsted in all phases of play, Roderick, Voyce, Ayliffe, and Merry being frequently prominent.

Except for being outpaced when Jacob and Smith scored – and the former has cleared other full-backs with equal facility – James gave a capital display, and Franklin, on the other side, performed his duties satisfactorily. Oxford, as already observed, were beaten at half-back and forward; it was their three-quarters who carried the side to victory, and for this achievement pace alone was the deciding factor.

Of Jacob's all-round ability as a centre, one could not judge on Thursday, but with half an opening he is capable of winning a match on his own. Smith is also a real flier, and Layman (whom Gloucester met at Northampton) is a dangerous man in attack, with a powerful hand-off. Richardson was rather outclassed, but proved his ability to kick goals, though four out of the five successful shots were from positions in front of the posts. The forwards, I understand, could be strengthened, but Thursday's lot were pretty useful, and against weaker opposition would make things warm.