Gloucester - the dark horses of the Premiership

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It may be hard for some to believe but Gloucester have become the dark horses of the Zurich Premiership this season. At the beginning of the season, even after Gloucester’s excellent Heineken Cup run, the prognosis from most pundits outside the city walls was that Gloucester would do well to finish higher than the seventh position they occupied at the end of last season’s Premiership campaign.

With the exception of possibly London Irish, who retain an interest in all competitions, Gloucester’s charge up the table to a strong second place seems to be the unexpected performance of the campaign to date.

The challenge for the Cherry and Whites though remains unfinished. In order to consolidate their second place, the West Country men know that they will have to continue their exemplary home form but also master the away day demons, which seems to have plagued Gloucester this season.

At home, fortress Kingsholm has been breached only once this season, by the Champions Leicester Tigers last September, as Gloucester’s new team bedded in. Away from GL1 however, the story is rather different; a solitary away league win against next months Parker Pen Shield opponents Sale Sharks is scant consolation for the Cherry and Whites endeavours this season.

Away from domestic competition and away from England’s green pastures, the Cherry and Whites have swept all before them. They finished top of their Parker Pen Shield Pool with six wins out of six. Gloucester destroyed minnows Caerphilly and GRAN Parma and French side La Rochelle were also well beaten. In the quarterfinal stages, Gloucester entertained Welsh side Ebbw Vale and in terrible conditions they took hold of the game and strangled the life out of the Steel Men.

Apart from a Powergen Cup defeat to London Irish a month ago, the Cherry and Whites remain unbeaten since December when a poor team performance lead to a defeat against West Country rivals Bath.

Incidentally, that was also Gloucester’s last league game on their travels and as previously suggested their away record this year continues to be the stumbling block for an undoubtedly talented team. Starting today, Gloucester must play nine more league games with six games coming away from fortress Kingsholm. They know that in order to maintain their second position in the Zurich Premiership, they must improve on one of the leagues worst away records.

Gloucester though will travel to Quins today in rich form. The Cherry and Whites met their Powergen Cup adversaries, the Exiles, again earlier this month as the Premiership clubs returned to league action after a break for the domestic and European Cup competitions. Gloucester’s closest rivals travelled to Kingsholm hoping for a clean sweep of victories this season, but were well beaten as Gloucester’s forwards again dominated the match.

Gloucester’s success this season has been built around a rock solid pack that can grind opponents into submission. They have a goal kicker in Ludovic Mercier with a rocket powered left foot that can keep the scoreboard ticking over at every opportunity and in Henry Paul, Daren O’Leary and Diego Albanese, Gloucester have the pace and guile out wide to exploit any chink in a teams defence.

Henry Paul
NEC Harlequins Vs Gloucester

Overall Record
Total Played: 86
Quins Victories: 36
Gloucester Victories: 46
Drawn: 4

League Record
Total Played: 23
Quins Victories: 13
Gloucester Victories: 9
Drawn: 1

Last Five Meetings
15th October 1999       Gloucester L 23-24, ADPI
25th March 2000         Stoop L 24-38, ADPI
23rd September 2000     Gloucester L 23-27, ZP
6th February 2001       Stoop W 21-19, ZP
13th October 2001       Gloucester L 7-33, ZP

Overall Record
Biggest winning margin: 75-19, 31st August 1996 at the Stoop
Most points scored: 75, 31st August 1996 at the Stoop
Heaviest defeat: 7-33, 13th October 2001 at Gloucester
Most points conceded: 38, On two occasions
Most tries scored in a game: 11, 31st August 1996 at the Stoop
Most conversions conceded in a game: 6, On three occasions
Most conversions scored in a game: 7, 31st August 1996 at the Stoop
Most conversions conceded in a game: 4, On two occasions
Most penalty goals scored in a game: 5, 20th October 1998 at the Stoop
Most penalty goals conceded in a game: 9, 23rd September 2000 at Gloucester
Most dropped goals scored in a game: 1, On seven occasions
Most dropped goals conceded in a game: 2, On two occasions

**Individual Player Statistics:**

**Quins:**
Most appearances against Gloucester: 14, J. Leonard
Most points against Gloucester: Overall - 70, D. O'Leary
In a game - 20, W. Carling, D. O'Leary
Most tries against Gloucester: Overall - 15, J.C. Gibbs
In a game - 5, J.C. Gibbs
Most conversions against Gloucester: Overall - 8, K. Chapman, H.B. Style
In a game - 7, W. Carling
Most penalty goals against Gloucester: Overall - 13, K. Bushell
In a game - 5, J. Schuster
Most dropped goals against Gloucester: Overall - 1, Seven players
In a game - 1, Seven players

**Gloucester:**
Most points against Quins: Overall - 81, T. Smith
In a game - 27, S. Mannix
Most tries against Quins: Overall - 3, T. Smith
In a game - 2, Six players
Most conversions against Quins: Overall - 7, T. Smith
In a game - 4, M. Roberts
Most penalty goals against Quins: Overall - 19, T. Smith, S. Mannix
In a game - 9, S. Mannix
Most dropped goals against Quins: Overall - 1, L. Mercier
In a game - 1, L. Mercier