

THE CITIZEN

MONDAY, DECEMBER 4, 1961

LOOK OUT, CAMBRIDGE ! DARK BLUES ARE NEARING PEAK

GLOUCESTER 8PTS., OXFORD UNIVERSITY 39PTS.

Depressing. . . slow. . . indecisive. . . inaccurate. . . outplayed. These are the words we think of when we recall Gloucester's regrettable form against the Dark Blues on Saturday. But what an entertaining game!

It was a matter of great wonder to those who saw Gloucester play Cambridge recently that the Light Blues did not put more points on the Cherry and Whites. Cambridge are an infinitely better team than Oxford this year but it seems, on the face of Saturday's bloodless massacre, that Oxford are rising on the crest of a wave and it would not surprise me in the least if they confounded the critics and won because of enthusiasm, strength and fitness as distinct from Cambridge's classic expertise.

If that were so the best team would not win but the team who had Richard Sharp would, for Sharp is an architect, a key figure in the Oxford play.

After the first ten minutes Gloucester's fancy abandoned all hope that this would be a fight and settled down to cheer the scorers and appreciate a lusty performance from the 'Varsity side.

SO FIT

Hooker Reg Chamberlayne had his moments in the early stages and notably Dick Smith and Alan Townsend produced consistently good form in the pack.

But the supreme fitness of the young men of Oxford soon took its toll on the rest of the eight as a unit in the moments when it was expected to work as a unit.

The backs suffered accordingly, starved of possession, and, when in possession, marked into the slippery turf by their counterparts.

When it was so evident that Oxford were not merely dictating, but also dictating for their own ends – practice – it is a little difficult to take Gloucester's performance seriously.

RISING TO A PEAK

But two points must be made in a personal view of the game. The first is that these young men play, practice, train and think in a tight Rugby community – especially before the 'Varsity game – and should be (like the present Oxford team) rising like boxing champions to a peak of fitness before the big fight. Gloucester and clubs generally are working men who train after a day's toil.

The second point, with particular reference to this game, is that Gloucester's tackling was woefully weak.

Sharp trotted almost casually through the game, a key man who opened doors for his backs almost unhindered, and the Oxford full-back Willcox fully deserves the description "ubiquitous."

OFF FORM

Stand-in, Stan Ingram, at full-back, did not have a good game; neither did Alan Holder in the centre. Occasionally fly-half Hopson's kicks were useful, bringing up the pack and scrum-half Mick Booth did his duty, but no more, I thought.

Neither of Gloucester's wings were given a chance.

Tony Ricketts scored a try and converted Dick Smith's try.

NO BACKING

The most frustrating Gloucester player of the day must have been Dick Smith, who more than once broke free of grasping Oxford defenders only to find himself alone with a long way to go to the line. He was poorly supported. But Tug Wilson did some customary intelligent work in the loose.

Oxford scorers – I nearly wrote sorcerers – were Hines (2), Sharp, Silk, Sachs, Dawkins, Adcock, Collingwood, McPartlin. Willcox converted six of their nine tries.

For the record, Gloucester have played 17, won eight, drawn one and lost eight. They have a credit of points amounting to 78. Bath on Saturday should enable them to tip the scales back in their favour and provide an entertainment to boot.