

THE CITIZEN

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FOOTBALL

FROM W.B.'S NOTEBOOK

GLOUCESTER v. LYDNEY

"A very satisfactory opening performance at home." I think this opinion will generally be supported by followers of the City Club as the result of the meeting with Lydney at Kingsholm last Saturday.

Compared with last season, Gloucester's display all-round was a distinct advance, as the relative scoring clearly indicated. Millington's successful goal-kicking appreciably augmented the City's aggregate of points, and the ex-captain is certainly to be congratulated on starting the season so splendidly. The majority of the place-kicks were certainly not difficult, but to convert five out of six shots – and the missed one was a fine effort which only just failed – is no mean achievement, and I am only re-echoing the wish of Millington's numerous admirers that he will continue the good work. A successful place-kicker is invaluable to a side, but I am afraid proper attention is not devoted by some clubs to this important branch of the game.

In addition to his goal-kicking, Millington reproduced his best form at full back. Always one of the safest fielders and catchers of the ball, the City custodian combines anticipation and judgment – features which are wonderful assets in a full back. On Saturday Millington scarcely made a mistake in this important phase of play, and it was fortunate for Gloucester that the Club had such a sound performer in the last line of defence.

The Lydney forwards were very dangerous at times with loose rushes, and it was a difficult matter to rob them of the ball. Millington's ability to kick either foot was another advantage in his favour in the opening match, and he got length and direction with the majority of his returns.

If the home full back shone refulgently, Joe Davies, the Lydney custodian, also gave an attractive display. Davies returned to his old club from Cinderford, and on his form against Gloucester Lydney should not suffer as the result of losing A. G. Brett, who has removed to Rugby. Davies had a lot of work to do at Kingsholm, but he came through his trying task with distinction. That Gloucester broke through the visitors' defence on six occasions was no immediate reflection on Davies, for it was more than one man could do to stop either score.

So much for the rival full backs. With Chantrill back in the field, and Greenman doing well for Cinderford, Gloucestershire should be well off for custodians this season.

With George Thomas and Crowther not seriously considered for selection at three-quarter owing to their absence from training – unavoidable owing to work, I presume – the Gloucester Committee played the same four against Lydney as operated at Stroud. The line included E. D. Pope, formerly of Hereford, who assisted Gloucester in that remarkable scoring game against Oxford last season. I did not see Pope in the Stroud match, but from several quarters I gathered he gave a very creditable performance, and no one was surprised that he was given a further trial.

A damaged leg considerably handicapped Pope against Lydney, and his poor display in this match must be attributed to this fact. The ex-Hereford man was to a large extent a passenger, for in addition to his movements being slowed down owing to his injury, he was very faulty in his handling. Sid Brown eventually changed places with Pope, and it would have paid Gloucester to have made this move earlier.

I am judging on results, for the City's combination was much more effective when the vice-captain filled the inside position. Pope has the physique necessary for a three-quarter, and should develop in good class company. If he could manage to get in some practice at Kingsholm with the other backs, the experience gained would be advantageous all-round.

Meanwhile Thomas, on last year's form, would fit in better for combination. But is he keen and anxious to play? A settlement of this question would be helpful. Thomas undoubtedly has football ability, and though he adapts himself with more success at outside half, he is more than useful at centre.

The Selection Committee, I know, are as anxious as anyone to obtain a three-quarter line in keeping with the standard of the other departments, and if their ambition is realised Gloucester should make things warm for any side in the country.

Loveridge filled the right wing position again on Saturday, and the Second teamer gave a very creditable display. There is no keener footballer in the Club than Loveridge, and he is a class of player one would like to see encouraged. He scored a couple of good tries against Lydney, and generally gave a capital account of himself.

A tendency to run back and across the field on occasions is a weakness he must endeavour to eradicate, but of pluck and dash he possesses an abundance. Loveridge has apparently not put on much weight since last season, and when coming into contact with bigger and heavier opponents he naturally suffers. Still he is so desperately keen on the game that one would like to see him do well.

Hughes and Brown, the other three-quarters, both distinguished themselves, and if the vice-captain could always exercise the same determination and confidence in his ability as he did in scoring the opening try last week, the "mathematical wizard" (*vide* "Teek") would be kept busier on the score board.

Hughes has lost none of his cleverness and dodging powers, and with a strong, thrusting, and clever centre alongside him Gloucester's scoring powers would be enhanced. Bristol have to be met at the Memorial Ground in a fortnight, and we want a settled and effective three-quarter line to back up the efforts of those in front.

At half-back the Milliner-Taylor combination repeated last season's success, and that is saying a good deal. Milliner is a straightforward scrum worker, but his value to the side is not confined to seeing that his partner obtains a good service of the ball; his defensive work stands out as a prominent feature of his play, and he is fearless in getting down to forward rushes. He did splendidly in this respect against Lydney, and showed an example to his colleagues which might have been followed with advantage.

Taylor was clever in attack, and that burst through of his when he scored was a beauty. The Doctor's kicking, too, was very helpful, though he did not find touch with his accustomed accuracy.

Gloucester should be exceptionally strong forward in a few weeks' time. Whatever some critics might think, Tom Voyce is still a potent force on the field, and if England can do without his services in the International matches, so much the better for the City Club.

Voyce takes his duties of captaincy seriously, and by example and injunction he kept the forwards continually on the move last week. The International was one of the hardest workers on the field, and besides contributing several strong individual bursts, he contrived to get in position to take part in open movements from one of which he scored, gathering an inside pass and racing over the line without any serious opposition.

The Gloucester front were well tested by the Lydney eight, who if they lacked finish gave nothing away in determination and dogged pertinacity. The tackling of the visitors was exceedingly keen, and several of their combined bursts threatened danger.

The scrummaging work of the City was good up to a point, but quicker and cleaner heeling is required in the tight; several times Milliner was placed at a disadvantage owing to the ball hanging in the back row.

A pleasing feature was the laudable efforts to open up the game in the loose and from lines-out, and with a little more attention given to cross-dribbling when opportunity serves, the forwards should add appreciably to their present all-round effectiveness. I may perhaps be somewhat too sanguine of the strength of the Gloucester pack, but I am certain the material is there if it can be properly developed.

The City's new forward, J. Reed, was watched closely on Saturday, and he fulfilled all the good things said of him. Reed is a worker if you like, and there are not likely to be many better forwards in the country than the Longhope ex-soldier when the season is well under weigh. A grafter in the tight, he keeps well on the ball, and opponents will find in him a difficult customer to tackle. Reed did capitally in the lines-out, and that burst of his and service of the ball to Ayliffe for the latter to score was the "real thing."

Reed is assuredly marked for a county trial, and with youth and physique in his favour, and the advantage of gaining experience in the best class of rugby football, he might easily go further. Reed reminded me somewhat of A. Kewney, the former English International forward, and if he should turn out anything like as good as the old Northumberland and Leicester player, he will prove a find for Gloucester.

The other City forwards all played up to reputation. There is plenty of weight in the pack, and a nice blending of youth and experience, and if the players can deal out the "clever stuff " – an expression I have heard used occasionally – matters should be all right forward. "Carry on, boys!"

Lydney have a useful all-round side who should more than hold their own in the majority of fixtures. Davies has already been referred to. The best of the three-quarters were Probert and F. Richards, but the men were not given sufficient scope to exploit their attacking powers. Wellington and W. Richards were a useful pair of half-backs, and the pick of a strong forward division were Willis, Taylor, Morris. and Reed.

The latter is a brother of the Gloucester forward, and there were no two players who more thoroughly enjoyed their football – the keener the exchanges the better they liked it, but all was clean and above board.

JC