

THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, JANUARY 1, 1927

RUGBY REFLECTIONS

O.M.T.'S TRIUMPH AT KINGSHOLM

GLOUCESTER A WELL BEATEN SIDE

Those of us who saw the Gloucester team eclipsed at Twickenham last Saturday week were not unprepared for another defeat in the annual Boxing Day match with the Old Merchant Taylors at Kingsholm.

In many respects it was a repetition of the Harlequins' game. In actual play the City had quite a fair share – especially in the second half, when the Taylors were rarely dangerous – but when comparing the teams in tactics, combination, skill and resolute running it was a case of the Londoners first and Gloucester a poor second.

Added to their weakness in attack, the home men's defence was generally shown up in a sorry light – there were individual exceptions – and the wonder was that the Taylors did not record a more decisive win than 21 points to 8. From a home point of view the result was naturally disappointing, but no one begrudged the Old Boys their splendid victory – their fourth at Kingsholm, I believe, over a long period of years.

The crowd certainly appreciated the fine football displayed by the Taylors, and the visitors paid tribute to the splendid reception they always receive at Kingsholm.

The Taylors have got together a very fine side this season, and victories over Blackheath, Devonport Services, the Harlequins, and United Services indicated their ability.

For the match against Gloucester they were strengthened by the inclusion of Spragg (the Oxford full-back) and Newell (the Cambridge reserve wing three-quarter). Voyce, the City captain, was still resting, but Gloucester had the valuable assistance of McIlwaine and Seabrook (the Cambridge forwards). But well as these two men played they could not make up for the deficiencies of the side as a whole. The Gloucester pack scrummaged badly, they were rarely together in the open, and the backing up was very poor indeed. We had this fact emphasised several times in the first half when McIlwaine broke clear, but with no-one anywhere near to take a pass. In this one respect, at least, the City badly missed the presence of Tom Voyce. Until the Gloucester forwards obtain some sort of understanding and cohesion – and this can only be obtained by constantly getting together and practising scrum formations – I cannot see any improvement in the near future. The majority of the present players, one recognises, have to gain experience, but the pack ought to be settling down into something like an effective unit now.

The Taylors have always possessed a strong forward division, and this season's eight quite upheld the club's reputation on Monday. In all their work the visitors appeared the better equipped eight. They were the masters in the scrums, and nearly always got in the first push, thus enabling the ball to be heeled smartly. In loose footwork and open play, too, the Old Boys held the advantage, and the close marking was a lesson to the home players.

For Gloucester, McIlwaine accomplished some brilliant work in the first half, and with proper support the City should have scored more than once. But for all round work Seabrook was as good as any forward on the field. Saxby also worked desperately, and with this trio playing regularly and Voyce in his best form, I think Gloucester would soon get back their lost reputation forward. But this is impossible as the two Cambridge players return to the University in the middle of next month.

Behind the scrum Gloucester again experimented with James at outside half, but with little success, and at the interval Millington returned to his old position. As a division the Kingsholm men were only moderately successful, and few real openings were cut out.

The passing for the most part was too mechanical, and the men had not got the pace to clear a fast and keen defence. Milliner did fairly well at the heels of the forwards, but Gloucester had not got a player of the class of Collier, whose elusiveness was a constant source of trouble to the home men. The Taylors' outside half was the inspiring force behind for the Londoners. He was at the top of his form, and at times made an exhibition of the defence. Occasionally a Gloucester player got his hands on Collier, but the half-hearted tackle was shaken off, and the visitor went on dodging his way through with infinite ease. Granted, Gloucester's defence was weak, Collier gave as good a performance of outside half-back play I have seen this season. Unfortunately for the Taylors he will be lost to the club shortly, as he is leaving England.

Millington did a lot of stopping, and was distinguished in other respects, but it was not a happy day for any of the Gloucester backs. James was good in patches, but still finishes badly, whilst his defence shows no improvement. Stephens scored Gloucester's second try with a determined run, which showed that the defence could be beaten, but he did not attempt these tactics often enough. Like his colleagues, he gave Collier and the brothers Bywater too much scope in the middle of the field, and the Taylors' fast wings were consequently well served.

Loveridge accomplished some of the best tackling seen on the Gloucester side, the acting captain going low for his man and rarely failing to bring him down. But too often Loveridge was left with two men to face, and his experience in this respect was not an encouraging one. Hughes did one or two bright things, but missed one good chance of scoring near the line. Gloucester's failings in the back division have been too often pointed out to need repetition. The Committee experimented with all the players available in order to obtain combination and an effective attack, but the desired results have not yet been achieved.

The Taylors were splendidly represented in the three-quarter line – a fast and clever set of players, with real thrusting powers. The Bywaters were particularly strong in the centre. They were always in position and rarely parted with the ball until the opposing player was drawn.

The wing men – Newell and Turnbull – were efficient in all respects, the former scoring two clever tries. He had Thomas well beaten on the first occasion, and in the second instance a well-judged punt over the Gloucester custodian's head allowed him to regain possession and score easily. In all their movements the Taylors' backs displayed a quickness and certainty that was missing in the Gloucester ranks, and their tactics generally were an object lesson to the City men.

Thomas, at full-back for Gloucester, made no serious mistake, but his performance as a whole was not quite up to the standard he has attained this season. Spragg, too, was by no means brilliant, though he did some sound work under pressure, particularly in the second half, when at one time Gloucester appeared likely to make a good recovery.