

THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1913

FOOTBALL

RUGBY

GLOUCESTER v. CHELTENHAM

FIRST OF THREE FIXTURES

STRENUOUS GAME IN THE RAIN

A POINTLESS DRAW

Cheltenham entered on their most important home engagement this afternoon, when Gloucester were the visitors. Unfortunately the weather conditions were about as bad as they could be. During the morning a cold rain fell persistently, and though the downfall became lighter as the time for commencing play approached, there was a renewal of the storm just after two o'clock, and the teams took the field under most unpleasant atmospheric circumstances.

There was an important alteration in the Cheltenham team. E. Hartell, formerly of Somerset, Bristol, and Northampton, had been selected to fill the gap caused by H. J. Barnes' removal to Coventry. At the last moment a wire was received from Hartell stating that he was laid up with influenza and could not possibly travel. Consequently Hopkins was taken out of the front line to operate with the three-quarters, and his place among the forwards was taken by Dr. Duckworth, who holds an appointment on the staff of Cheltenham General Hospital.

In the Gloucester team there was also a last minute change, Millard dropping out and Mumford taking his place. Hamblin, Smart and Halford were also absentees.

The teams lined up as under : –

GLOUCESTER	POSITIONS	CHELTENHAM
C. Cook	Backs.	B. Davy
F. Webb	Three-Quarter	H. Hughes
A. Lewis (capt.)	Backs	Dr. R. MacGregor
S. Sysum	"	F. J. Hopkins
W. Washbourn	"	T. H. Gange
A. Hall	Half-Backs	B. S. Bloodworth
J. Baker	"	G. Barnes
N. Hayes	Forwards	H. Wixey
J. Meadows	"	F. T. Wixey
J. F. Lawson	"	C. Bennett
A. Cook	"	Dr. H. L. Duckworth
W. Parham	"	W. Burford
C. Mumford	"	F. Taylor
A. Saunders	"	A. Hayling
A. H. Williams	"	J. Townsend

Referee : Mr. J. Southby (Bristol).

THE GAME

There was no cessation of the downpour, and under these wretched conditions it was not surprising that the "gate" fell a long way below expectations. A considerable contingent came over with the team from Gloucester, probably as many as the home supporters who turned out to cheer on their favourites. But all told the number did not exceed six or seven hundred. This meant a great financial loss to the Cheltenham club, who had hoped to "bag" an extra £50 out of this match.

The heavy state of the ground and the greasy condition of the ball were, of course, features which detracted from the prospects of a fast, open game, but they were generally considered to assist rather than otherwise the chances of the home side.

The game was started by Cheltenham about fifteen minutes late. Gloucester got the ball out of the first two scrums, and in the second Hopkins collided heavily with Hall, their foreheads striking. Hall went off the field with a cut over the eye, and Hopkins was carried off the ground by the ambulance men with a slight concussion. F. Wixey took Hopkins' place and A. Cook deputised for Hall.

In the ensuing play Gloucester got down to Cheltenham quarters and a pretty bout of passing, in which all the visiting three-quarters handled, though not making much ground, and when the ball eventually reached Cook he was put down by Barnes. A slice of ground was recovered by the judicious kick to touch by MacGregor, and Davy repeated this performance with interest after Gloucester had rushed down again.

Upon the ball coming out of the scrum on the Gloucester side – as it did with regularity – Lewis sent it nicely from half way to the 25, and some more good passing by Gloucester looked dangerous until Gange floored his man. Hopkins now returned to the field amid cheers, and a fine kick by Bloodworth got past C. Cook, who had hardly secured, before Hughes was up. The wing man was unable to check the kick, however, and the ball getting once more among the visiting forwards, they rushed matters down to within a few yards of the home line.

Gloucester, however, lacked scoring ability, and by excellent footwork Cheltenham transferred the game to Gloucester quarters. Back it came, however, and Alec Lewis handled prettily. Still, a very stubborn defence was set up by Cheltenham, and at the same time such keenness was developed on both sides that the referee spoke to Washbourn, as he had previously to Hughes.

Gloucester were getting the ball every time from the scrum, the forwards considerably helping Baker, who found Barnes a hard nut to crack. The Cheltenham scrummer also tried a dribble on his own and sent the ball over the line, but Cook was there and a touchdown only was registered.

Right to the other end the game went, and when close up to the line the visitors were robbed of a certain try by Davy, who went down to the ball pluckily, took it from the feet of the Gloucester forwards, and kicked out of danger.

Another bout all across the line displayed Gloucester's handling powers, but no ground was gained, and Washbourn could not get away when he eventually received. Out the ball was again sent by Baker, but the Cheltenham men were safe tacklers, and, taking up the attack, rushed the ball to mid-way, while a long kick gave further assistance to the homesters.

The Gloucester forwards came away, and things looked awkward, Davy being unable to pick up when the oval reached him. Luckily for Cheltenham the whistle called back. Then Alec Lewis was prominent for a smart run, Baker having fed him with judgment, but the next transfer went a-begging. Fumbling by Bloodworth let Gloucester into the home quarters, and a dangerous situation was saved by a penalty kick awarded to Cheltenham.

HALF-TIME SCORE :

Cheltenham	Nil
Gloucester	Nil

Gloucester resumed with Hall again in his place. Cheltenham carried the first scrum, but Bloodworth was slow in getting in his kick. Picking up in the loose, Hopkins sent the ball down to Gloucester quarters, and here it was sent out to Hughes. The left wing failed badly. With the line at his mercy he knocked on. Still keeping up the pressure, the home forwards crossed and Taylor did the necessary, but, unfortunately for Cheltenham, he was ruled off-side.

The kick-out brought little relief to Gloucester, as the Cheltenham forwards took matters into their own hands and overran the visitors – right down to the line again. There was no scoring power, however.

The game having been transferred to mid-field, Gange seized, and though surrounded managed to get in a nice kick, once again putting his side on the attack. When the ball came to Hopkins he kicked a little too hard, and once more Gloucester saved by touching down. The kick out gained a huge slice of ground, but this was recovered by the Cheltenham forwards, and then Norman Hayes was prominent for a strong burst along the right line, Baker also eliciting cheers for some smart work round the scrum.

Hereabouts Gloucester kicked over the line, and Cheltenham touched down. Following this the ball reached Hall, and he forged his way through half a dozen men before passing forward. From a scramble the ball came to Gange, and he got by all opposition till reaching Cook, over whose head he punted just a little too obliquely, the ball going into touch before he could reach it; otherwise he had a clear course, though thirty yards from home.

A forward pass to Washbourn was not seen by the referee, and that player was able to send the ball to the Cheltenham 25. The local men now showed over-anxiety, kicking too hard, as Cook was easily able to nullify these efforts. The ball now coming to MacGregor the centre man put in a good run, but his transfer to F. Wixey, who was following up well, went forward, and nothing happened. The Gloucester forwards repeated the mistake of kicking too hard, the ball being sent out of play as a result, though the last kick came from a Cheltenham man.

In the semi-darkness each side attacked in turn. From a penalty Cook essayed a goal, but could not cover the distance, and Cheltenham put into touch. In the last few minutes the Gloucester backs handled beautifully, but could not reach the line. Ken Hopkins got off-side, and Cook took the kick in a favourable position, but failed, the ball going wide. In the last ten seconds Cheltenham came well down the ground, but it was too late to do anything.

RESULT :

Cheltenham	Nil
Gloucester	Nil

REMARKS

(BY OUR CHELTENHAM REPRESENTATIVE)

Any other result would not have fairly represented the game. Cheltenham ought to have scored once when Hughes was offered a pass with an open course only half a dozen yards from the line, and Gloucester ought to have notched three points from a penalty kick right in front of Cheltenham's goal; but as the home wing man failed so the visiting full-back omitted to allow for the force of the wind, poetic justice thereby decreeing that the one failure should be set off by the other.

Of the game itself, it was very vigorously contested on each side. The fact that two men were laid out within the first three minutes did not deter the others from putting their last ounce into the struggle in which more could not have been done had life depended. Fought out for the most part by the forwards, there were not a few good handling movements, the Gloucester backs appearing to best advantage in this department, though it must be confessed there was little directness in their attack, while there was either a lack of skill in the wing men or the ball came to them too late to do anything effective with it.

A. Lewis was the pick with Webb best in the defensive work. The re-arrangement of the Cheltenham three-quarter line no doubt adversely affected their attack. Gange was the better of the two wing men, but it is open to question if he would not have done better had he gone for Cook instead of punting over his head when he had got past all other opposition. Hughes showed great pace, and at times kicked well, but he must have had a bad quarter of an hour after that regrettable knock-on.

In the centre MacGregor opened out well at times, and he also put in one particularly good run, the finish to which was a most unlucky forward pass. Hopkins was as bustling as usual, though displaying a disposition to ignore the off-side rule, which on one occasion nearly lost his side three points from a penalty kick.

Of the half-backs, a comparison can hardly be made between Barnes and Baker, as for quite three-fourths of the game the Gloucester forwards controlled the scrums, and heeled out with the promptness seldom witnessed on the Athletic Ground, thus giving the Gloucester man all the advantage. Still, Barnes was most alert, and when he was assisted by his forwards there was no question as to the ball getting amongst the backs.

Bloodworth was only moderately successful as stand-off half. It was unfortunate for the visitors that Hall was kept off the field practically the whole of the first half and that he was not himself when he returned in the second half. Yet it was when Gloucester were playing fourteen men only that they did most of their pressing. They certainly attacked more often than Cheltenham in the first half, whereas Cheltenham were distinctly the aggressors for three-fourths of the time in the second half.

The brothers Wixey and Bennett were, perhaps, the best of the home forwards, though where all did so well it may seem invidious to particularise. Each full-back played a strong game, good length kicking being features of both C. Cook's and B. Davy's play, while neither let his side down.

COMMENTS BY W.B.

What a day, and what bad luck for Cheltenham, for it is to the Gloucester match the Town Club always look for a big lift in finances. But the rain to-day must have lost Cheltenham anything up to £40.

Of the game, it can be dismissed in a very few comments. Perhaps a draw was the best result obtainable, for the conditions handicapped the players to such an extent that correct play was reduced to a minimum. Gloucester undoubtedly ought to have been a few points up in the first half considering the amount of attacking they did. Rarely indeed were Cheltenham allowed out of their half, and the Gloucester forwards obtained the ball just as and when they pleased.

The absence of Hall meant a big loss to the City, for had he been on the field, and in his best form, I very much question if the home defence, keen as it was, could have held out. Hall came back for the second half, but he was by no means himself, and I think he was taking too much risk in returning.

Cheltenham, always happy in the kick and rush game, made strenuous efforts in the second half, and several times they came desperately near scoring. The forwards confined themselves almost entirely to footwork, and the backs did not attempt a single round of passing. Under the conditions these were the best tactics, and Gloucester would have done better had they used their feet more at the outset.

That the City men could dribble was frequently testified, the pack breaking up well and toeing the ball with excellent judgment. Gloucester outplayed their opponents in the scrums, and there was also more cleverness displayed by the visitors in the loose. Hayes was in capital trim all round – he made one lovely burst from a line-out which ought to have materialised – and Saunders, Meadows, and Lawton were also conspicuous for special mention. For Cheltenham, Bennett was the pick.

Outside the scrum the features were the smart play of Baker, and the full back displays of C. Cook and Davy. Baker did wonderfully well on the whole, and was too smart for Barnes, though the latter exhibited plenty of pluck. Reference has already been made to Hall; on the Cheltenham side Bloodworth was off his game completely. Except in tackling and kicking the Town three-quarters did little, and there was no outstanding player. The Gloucester men attempted a lot of handling, but it generally ended in failure. Twice A. Cook, who came out to the third line when Hall was off, had good chances on the left wing, but he was not fast enough. Davy saved in fine style on several occasions in the first half, and Cook was also very reliable both in catching and clearing.