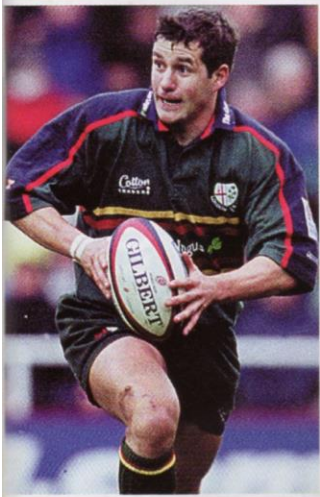


OFFICIAL MATCHDAY PROGRAMME - PRICE £2.50

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victory



LONDON IRISH

VERSUS GLOUCESTER - MONDAY 16TH APRIL 2001



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TODAY'S MATCH SPONSOR



COMPETITION

The Craic in the Valley - it's more than 80 minutes of Rugby



GLOUCESTER

SEASON SO FAR...

In order to find an analogy of the Gloucester season, the best place to look would be a fairground, the ride of choice: a roller coaster. During this 2000-2001 season, the Gloucester team have achieved many fantastic highs, only to have themselves brought back down to earth by some nasty lows.

On the horizon looms a European Cup Semi-final whilst today we focus on the struggle of the play-offs as both teams attempt to rekindle their league season. That, in a nutshell is Gloucester's season. Whilst conquering all before them in Europe's premier competition, in the rigours of the domestic concerns Gloucester have flattered to deceive.

The roots of this problem are to be found way back in August. A trip to the revamped Saracens was Gloucester's first task and they travelled down with barely fifteen fit squad players. An entire first team was on the sidelines recovering from the monumental effort put in the season before. Gloucester was on the wrong end of a drubbing that day as Saracens topped the fifty-point mark. A

philosophical Philippe St André was cursing his bad luck at having assembled a great team only to be unable to use it.

At fortress Kingsholm, form was little better as loses followed to both Bath and Sale. New captain Ian Jones stood down to concentrate on his own game, leaving Kingsley Jones (back from injury), to steer the good ship Gloucester out of these very muddy waters once again. October brought a change in fortune and it was no mere coincidence that both Jason Little and Phil Vickery made their first starts in a rousing win over west-country rivals Bristol.

The European competition started and the Cherry and Whites beat the much-fancied Scarlets' of Llanelli in the cauldron that is Stradey Park. This was without doubt one of Gloucester's finest moments. Gloucester subsequently drew with Colomiers at home and lost away, but their victories against Roma earned them the chance to play Llanelli again to decide who would progress.

In front of a packed Kingsholm and around three and a half

million BBC viewers, a last minute Elton Moncreiff drop-goal spooned off a Llanelli back and over the posts. Gloucester won a heart stopping game with only seconds to spare. The win earned them a home tie against Cardiff, and Llanelli, the nation's sympathies.

Although the home team, the Gloucester squad was given little chance against an exceptional Cardiff outfit which boasted a host of internationals. The Gloucester pack dominated and the backs allowed their illustrious counterparts no room to manoeuvre.

This was not the first time a Gloucester team has won despite being written off. At Bath in the Tetley's Bitter Cup, the cameras turned up expecting to see Bath win against a Gloucester second team. The hungry Gloucester players won at The Rec for the first time in twenty-nine years and young forwards Mark Cornwell and Andy Hazell reminded everyone of what they could do.

After these great cup exploits, the return to the league was far less

spectacular. However, in consecutive weeks, Gloucester beat London Irish during monsoon season and then Saracens by a point. Buoyant, they travelled to Leicester and outscored the Champions elect by three tries to one only to lose to a try in the eighty-fourth minute of play.

A win against Newcastle before Christmas was to be Gloucester's only win in five subsequent league games. Losses to Northampton, Bristol, Harlequins, Wasps and another fifty points drubbing at Bath followed. This apparent riches to rags story was hard for all concerned and many fingers outside the club were pointing accusingly.

Coming in to today's game however, the courage and hard work of both players and coaches looks to be paying dividends. Unbeaten in three matches, Gloucester remains focused on the importance of today's game.

Like all roller coasters there are always hidden surprises between the ups and downs.

James Bennett for Gloucester RFC.

TODAY'S TEAM SHEET

LONDON IRISH			GLOUCESTER		
	JUSTIN BISHOP	15	CHRIS CATLING		
	PAUL SACEY	14	JOE EWENS		
	GEOFF APPLEFORD	13	TERRY FANOLUA		
	ROB HOADLEY	12	JASON LITTLE		
tick the players who start	NNAMDI EZULIKE	11	TOM BEIM	tick the players who start	
	BARRY EVERITT	10	SIMON MANNIX		
	KIERAN CAMPBELL	9	ANDY GOMARSALL		
	MIKE WORSLEY	1	TREVOR WOODMAN		
	RICHARD KIRKE	2	JAWAD DJOUDI		
	SIMON HALFORD	3	ANDY DEACON (CAPT)		
	RYAN STRUDWICK (CAPT)	4	ROB FIDLER		
	GLENN DELANEY	5	IAN JONES		
	EDDIE HALVEY	6	JAKE BOER		
	KIERON DAWSON	7	ANDY HAZELL		
	CHRIS SHEASBY	8	JUNIOR PARAMORE		
REPLACEMENTS			REPLACEMENTS		
number of replacement	JARROD CUNNINGHAM	16	BYRON HAYWARD	number of replacement	
	OFISA TONU'U	17	OLIVIER AZAM		
	DECLAN DANAHER	18	ROBERT TODD		
	ADRIAN FLAVIN	19	KINGSLEY JONES		
	RICHARD BATES	20	ADAM EUSTACE		
	NEAL HATLEY	21	STEVE OJOMOH		
	JEFF FAHRENSOHN	22	STEPHAN SANCHEZ		
TODAY'S MATCH OFFICIALS					
REFeree MR T SPREADBURY (RFU)					
TOUCH JUDGE 1 MR T MILLER (RFU)					
TOUCH JUDGE 2 MR P EMERSON (RFU)					