

# GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECHO

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STAUNCH DEFENCE HANDS GLOUCESTER VICTORY

CHERRY AND WHITES COME OUT ON TOP

IN SCRAPPY LEEDS OPENER

LEEDS 16 GLOUCESTER 21

They say it can be grim up north and this was certainly one of the grimmest, ugliest and scrappiest starts imaginable to the Zurich Premiership.

Baked to the core in furnace-hot conditions, Gloucester slugged themselves to a defensively outstanding opening day victory, collecting four priceless points on a frustrating and unfulfilling afternoon in the Headingley sunshine. Purists would surely have loathed this to bits.

It was dour and dismal, choked to death by a lack of pattern and a stream of errors that hindered two sides grappling for supremacy in a traditionally cagey start to the season.

What they did not need was a referee like Steve Lander, who denied the game any cohesion and flow with an endless torrent of whistle.

Something always appears wrong to the immense frustration of both teams – either the scrummage is faulty, the line-out mis-managed or the contact area cluttered – and neither Leeds nor Gloucester fully got to grips with any facet of the game.

If they had been given the freedom to play, Gloucester would have certainly won with greater efficiency but they scored two good tries that crucially closed out the victory before eight minutes of injury time handed Leeds a try and a losing bonus point they frankly did not deserve.

Phil Davis, their director of rugby, said: “I am glad we got a point, because I didn’t think we deserved one.

“It was a dull and frustrating game and we couldn’t get anything going. The line-out was poor and we didn’t get going in any area of the game.”

Gloucester will simply be delighted to have come away with a victory that was all about resolve and intensity, rather than anything electrifying. The performance was passable, nothing more, but the points are priceless and they can be thankful for their pre-season conditioning and sheer weight of tackle for the success.

Galvanised by an abrasive and forceful debut from Gary Powell and a powerful contribution by Adam Balding, they got the better of a sizeable Leeds pack that functioned only in fits and starts.

They even overcame the loss of prop Terry Sigley 11 minutes into his debut with an ankle injury, as they still had too much forward beef when required.

On top in the scrum, even when down to seven men following a welcome back yellow card for Olivier Azam, and profiting from a wayward line-out, Gloucester chipped away into a half-time lead.

The more incisive rugby came from the hands of Duncan McRae, Henry Paul, and Terry Fanolua in the suffocating heat and despite slipping 6-3 behind thanks to two Duncan Hodge penalties against one from Paul, Gloucester took the lead at the end of the first quarter with a lovely try.

McRae sent Paul busily through a midfield gap that ate up ground inside Leeds’ 22. James Simpson-Daniel weaved further forward with a twist and a glide that almost sent Alex Brown to the line, but as the cavalry arrived, Simon Amor fed McRae and he put the diving Fanolua over to score.

Fanolua, all haircut and aggression, was one of Gloucester's leading lights and so too was Amor. He worked tirelessly away from the scrum-half position as his side found themselves ahead thanks to their one meaningful sortie of the half.

Leeds were fitful and not very effective. They are the arch scrappers of the Premiership and no team works harder at home. But they were so out of sorts that skipper Tom Palmer was withdrawn in the second half and they were outfought in the key areas in which they usually thrive.

Gloucester began the second period with another yellow card – this time given to McRae for tripping Alan Dickins – but Leeds could not find a way to the line despite being a man heavier for 20 minutes, which only emphasised their difficulties.

They found it almost impossible to keep possession for more than two phases as Gloucester, to a man, tackled themselves to a near standstill.

By the end, the replacements were made because of sheer fatigue to help shore up a pack that was out on its collective feet in the heat.

But what Gloucester could not do was find the score that would have closed out the game.

They enjoyed plenty of prime field position, but failed to control the game with the type of authority that was craved for on the touchline and the second half remained scoreless until the 65th minute when Gordon Ross landed a penalty to make it 13-9.

However, McRae dropped a 74th minute goal following a wave of pressure before he created the decisive try in the final minute.

Pete Buxton's initial burst broke the first line of the Leeds defence before McRae arced a break to beneath the posts from right to left.

When he came again across the face of the goal, his long, looping cut-out pass evaded the last defender and Simpson-Daniel gratefully sailed in to grab the score.

Done and dusted. Gloucester clearly thought the match was over but from yet another series of scrummages, Leeds kept the ball long enough for Gavin Kerr to score from an inside pass. Jake Boer, one of their main tacklers, was livid and it was understandable.

The margin of victory gave little indication of the gap between the sides.

There will be better to come from Gloucester, that is certain, and they will be thankful for escaping the Tykes with all four points following their calamity last season.

LEEDS: M. Cardey; D. Rees, C. Bell, A. Snyman, T. Biggs; D. Hodge (G. Ross 33), M. McMillan (A. Dickens 44); G. Kerr, R. Rawlinson (M. Regan 44), M. Holt (M. Cusack 80), C. Murphy, T. Palmer (S. Morgan 63), P. Uys, R. Parks (J. Dunbar 63), A. Popham.  
Other Rep.: D. Albanese.

GLOUCESTER: J. Goodridge; M. Garvey, T. Fanolua, H. Paul, J. Simpson-Daniel; D. McRae, S. Amor; T. Sigley (N. Wood 10), O. Azam (C. Fortey 71), G. Powell, A. Eustace (P. Buxton 53), A. Brown, A. Balding (M. Cornwell 67), J. Boer, J. Forrester.  
Other reps.: A. Page, N. Mauger, J. Bailey.

REFEREE: S. Lander.

ATTENDANCE: 4,079

STAR MAN: Virtually all the attacking rugby came from Gloucester with Duncan McRae, Henry Paul and Terry Fanolua all heavily involved, but for a combative, powerful and mightily effective performance in the scrum, GARY POWELL was star man on his Gloucester debut.

## TIMELINE.

SIX MINUTES: Duncan Hodge penalty.  
Leeds 3, Gloucester 0.

13 MINUTES: Henry Paul penalty.  
Leeds 3, Gloucester 3.

15 MINUTES: Hodge penalty.  
Leeds 6, Gloucester 3.

18 MINUTES: Terry Fanolua try, Paul conversion.  
Leeds 6, Gloucester 10.

27 MINUTES: Olivier Azam yellow card.

38 MINUTES: Paul penalty.  
Leeds 6, Gloucester 13.

45 MINUTES: Duncan McRae yellow card.

65 MINUTES: Gordon Ross penalty.  
Leeds 9, Gloucester 13.

74 MINUTES: McRae drop-goal.  
Leeds 9, Gloucester 16.

80 MINUTES: Simpson-Daniel try.  
Leeds 9, Gloucester 21.

80 MINUTES (plus 8):  
Gavin Kerr try, Ross conversion.  
Leeds 16, Gloucester 21.