

THE CITIZEN

MONDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2004

WILL WE EVER WIN AT BATH ?

FITFUL GLOUCESTER SEE REC. HOODOO CONTINUE

CHERRY AND WHITES LOSE FACE AT THE HOME OF THEIR
WEST COUNTRY RIVALS

BATH 29 GLOUCESTER 14

For God knows how many years, Cherry and White legions of varying qualities and substance have tried to make sense of Bath at the Rec and each time, they have only been successful in disappearing up their own nether regions.

This is already rugby's greatest inferiority complex and as each year passes, it becomes harder for Gloucester to achieve the thing they crave most.

They may have become Munster mince twice in succession at Thomond Park in European Cup death matches and stung by Wasps on two harrowing occasions at Twickenham and High Wycombe, but that is nothing compared to the willies a trip to Somerset gives them.

For no fathomable reason, their game falls apart every time they get a whiff of something blue and white at the Rec.

At home, they are one of the meanest and moodiest bunches of hardheads in the business. Their game is built on a forward intimidation and power that is married with a dashing cutting edge that creates a potent mixture of gristle and guile.

But get them within distance of the Rec and their line-out falls apart, they are bossed around at the contact area and unable to penetrate behind the scrum because of a distinct lack of meaningful possession.

Not only were they seriously below par, Gloucester looked half-baked and ill at ease on Saturday after a disjointed week of preparation.

Their skipper, the remarkably consistent Jake Boer, hardly trained because of flu, Gary Powell returned from a two-week injury lay-off and Olivier Azam had spent much of the previous seven days sorting out a personal problem in France.

It bred a Cherry and White mix short of patience and match fitness. They were fitful and panicky, driven to distraction by Bath's superior urgency and efficiency.

Their game is hardly a thing of beauty but Gloucester had no answer to it and that would have frustrated them even more, because they are distinctly better than they showed here.

But Bath thoroughly deserved their victory.

The blood-hounds in their pack ruled the deep waters of the contest throughout, ensuring a free ride in the line-outs, and a dominance at the breakdown they could only have dreamed of, particularly as Gloucester were without the hunter-scavenger routine supplied by Andy Hazell around the tackle area.

It meant Andy Beattie, playing at something approaching maximum temperature at blindside was outstanding on the front foot as a muscular enforcer. Danny Grewcock and Steve Borthwick caused no end of problems as they ganged up on Alex Brown at the line-out and Duncan Bell was terrific in the scrums.

They were able to dominate the one-on-one collisions to great effect, denying Gloucester a platform into the game.

Bath's continuity allowed them to build pressure and Olly Barkley dictated the pattern of the game much to his liking.

His multi-layered talents have not always been appreciated by his coach John Connolly this season, who has used him at outside-half and inside centre, but even he had to admit his number 10 was excellent.

Not only does he tackle his poundage – had Jonny Wilkinson never existed we would be talking about Barkley as the redefining defensive influence at stand-off – he kicks his goals and ran the game with growing authority with a smile on his face.

Gloucester offered precious little and it is rare for such a litany of mistakes to blight them like they did here. Considering they conceded so many cheap penalties and were shoddily disciplined, they were somehow locked at 6-6 when Barkley's hanging time-bomb exploded behind enemy lines midway through the second quarter.

Jon Goodridge could not gather under pressure from Mike Tindall and Duncan McRae failed to Hoover up the bouncing ball cleanly and Tindall, back to his forceful best, dived in to score.

It was the score that sprung the game open and Bath never looked back. Gloucester failed to handle anything with great assurance but their most worrying fault-line was the meagre amount of primary possession and number of mistakes.

Barkley and Paul exchanged penalties before the break and when Duncan McRae raided for a drop-goal immediately after the restart, Gloucester hinted at something of a recovery.

But it never materialised. Tindall wrapped the game up for Bath with his second try at the end of the third quarter,

Already without Azam – sinbinned for up-ending Grewcock at a line-out two minutes after replacing Chris Fortey – Gloucester chose to contest the throw but when Wood's pass found the England centre cutting a jagged line past McRae and Marcel Garvey, Bath's victory was sealed.

Had it not been for the in-your-face hostilities of Terry Fanolua, who caused a gasp of worry every time he went forward, Gloucester would have been without threat for vast periods.

As it was, Goodridge collected their only try when he pounced on McRae's roller with 13 minutes to go after the Australian slid a neat kick through Bath's otherwise excellent defence.

Gloucester have dates with Harlequins and Worcester in successive weeks and they will be keen to get yet another Rec nightmare out of their system.

BATH: L. Best; A. Higgins, R. Fleck, M. Tindall, B. Daniel (S. Davey 70); O. Barkley, M. Wood (N. Walshe 72); D. Barnes (M. Stevens 35), J. Humphries (c) (R. Hawkins 67), D. Bell (D. Barnes 70), S. Borthwick, D. Grewcock (R. Fidler 70), A. Beattie (G. Delve 79), M. Lipman, Z. Feaunati.

Other rep.: C. Malone.

GLOUCESTER: J. Goodridge; M. Garvey, T. Fanolua, H. Paul, J. Simpson-Daniel; D. McRae, A. Gomarsall; T. Sigley (C. Bezuidenhout 45), C. Fortey (O. Azam 45), G. Powell, A. Eustace (J. Forrester 66), A. Brown, P. Buxton, J. Boer (capt.), A. Balding (C. Fortey 52-62).

Other reps.: N. Wood, A. Hazell, S. Amor, J. Bailey.

REFEREE: A. Pearson (RFU)

ATTENDANCE: 10,400

STAR MAN: TERRY FANOLUA. Outgunned in most areas, Fanolua kept Gloucester going forward on an afternoon the Cherry and Whites will want to forget.

TIMELINE.

ONE MINUTE: Gloucester penalised at line-out. Olly Barkley penalty.
Bath 3, Gloucester 0.

15 MINUTES: Henry Paul penalty after Bath penalised for off-side.
Bath 3, Gloucester 3.

22 MINUTES: Martyn Wood makes a break and at the breakdown, Adam Eustace comes in from the side. Barkley kicks penalty.
Bath 6, Gloucester 3.

26 MINUTES: Paul levels the score with his second penalty.
Bath 6, Gloucester 6.

29 MINUTES: Mike Tindall scores after gathering possession when Jon Goodridge and Duncan McRae make a mess of Barkley's up and under, Barkley converts.
Bath 13, Gloucester 6.

33 MINUTES: Barkley penalty.
Bath 16, Gloucester 6.

44 MINUTES: McRae drops a goal for Gloucester.
Bath 16, Gloucester 9.

47 MINUTES: Gloucester penalised for pulling down a maul. Barkley kicks penalty.
Bath 19, Gloucester 9.

49 MINUTES: Olivier Azam yellow carded for pulling down Danny Grewcock and Barkley kicks penalty.
Bath 22, Gloucester 9

57 MINUTES: Tindall cuts a superb line from a line-out to beat McRae and Marcel Garvey to the line for the try. Barkley converts from the touchline.
Bath 29, Gloucester 9

68 MINUTES: McRae's roller is gathered by Goodridge who scores but Paul cannot add the conversion.
Bath 29, Gloucester 14.