

THE CITIZEN

MONDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2004

A CLOSE CALL

GREAT ESCAPE BY THE CHERRY AND WHITES

REMARKABLE DEFENCE EARNS THE VICTORY AS GLOUCESTER
HANG ON

WORCESTER 13 GLOUCESTER 18

There is no point beating around the bush. Worcester should have won the newest form of M5 derby mayhem.

Inspired by an insanely committed and downright desperate pack of forwards, Worcester produced a performance of almost mystic proportions to take Gloucester to the wire and then some.

The line-outs were bitterly disputed throughout, the breakdown a vast no-go area for anybody less than 100% prepared for a right shoeing and as for the scrummage – well, that was a mass of twisted bodies who scrapped from start to finish.

Worcester gave as good as they got in every department. Craig Gillies, a monster in the set-piece, set about the Gloucester line-out, Pat Sanderson, a loosie of considerable menace, was scintillating in his work-rate and the front row were prepared to tangle with the Kingsholmites until the cows came home.

How the Cherry and White half of this domestic dispute escaped with the booty was largely down to their quite remarkable defence, four minutes of blue-touch paper attacking that created their tries and two gilt-edged moments of profligacy from Thinus Delpont that should have earned the Warriors victory.

The Springbok opted for Sixways in the summer after contract negotiations broke down at Kingsholm following a horrendous knee injury last season and he could have enjoyed the last, very hearty laugh had he sealed either of the moves he was directly involved in that Worcester worked so hard to create.

The first came at the start of the second quarter with Worcester breathing fire at Gloucester's swaying foundations having already crossed for the opening try.

Dale Rasmussen and Matt Powell were heavily involved in storming the barricades but when Delpont arrived to straighten an excellent attack, he ignored a two-man overlap and was devoured in the tackle.

And the second, an even clearer opportunity, presented itself in the final minute following a burgling line-out steal from the magnificent Gillies.

Delpont came left and should have continued on his curving run to the line but his looping pass towards Ben Hinshelwood was smothered by the Gloucester defence and after an aberration by Lee Fortey at the ruck, something that must run in the family, the match was over.

John Brain, the resourceful Worcester coach, said: "We competed very well and all the players can be very proud of their efforts but these things are decided by very small margins.

"We have proved we are not another Rotherham but we must start winning these games because we had our chances."

It might be going some to say this was played at Heineken Cup pitch but it was not far off and had Worcester possessed an ounce more nerve in the key areas, they would have snatched it.

Gloucester have their problems just now, particularly in establishing a meaningful foundation but it is a third away win in four attempts and emphasised just how hard teams have to work to beat them.

They would certainly have planned for greater dominance up front and considerably more blow-torch power, but they rarely got into their stride.

The tackle areas were a mess and the scrums little better but they will be grateful to the steadying influence of Phil Vickery, a devastating defensive platform from Henry Paul and two brilliant attacking tries.

But first they had to overcome a barnstorming Worcester start.

Their try came after 12 minutes with lock Tim Collier in the cooler for tipping Adam Balding at a line-out.

However, Matt Powell's kick was gathered by Jon Goodridge and in the maelstrom, the ball shot out on the Worcester side towards Tony Windo. Looking like a prop with the key to rugby heaven, the former Kingsholm man picked up and galloped in to score, untouched and almost unseen.

Gloucester will insist an illegal hand pushed the ball back at the ruck but it was little more than Worcester deserved for half-an-hour's outstanding devotion to the cause.

Paul made two scything waist-high tackles on Sanderson as the temperature rose and it was not until the 50th minute that the tide turned with Gloucester 10-6 down.

Their first try was a beauty and involved Duncan McRae three times, Andy Gomarsall three times and Paul, the eventual scorer, twice. In all the ball slipped and slid through 14 pairs of hands and after James Simpson-Daniel had breathed life into the move and Olivier Azam sustained the pressure with a line-breaking drive, Paul scored from McRae's pass to the right of the sticks.

And then, four minutes later, McRae, Paul and Andy Hazell led the assault and when Gomarsall traded passes with Azam, McRae's neat roller was chased down brilliantly by Goodridge who slid in to score.

It was the only stage Gloucester played through more than two or three phases but they are a team always capable of snatching points and their purple patch settled the contest.

Vickery and Steven Sparks were sinbinned for trading punches at a scrum and Brown's penalty, to trim the deficit to 18-16, hit the post and was cleared by a combination of Adam Eustace and McRae.

The temperature rose even further in the frantic closing stages as Worcester's steaming pack laid siege to the Gloucester line.

Wave after wave of close range attacks were denied and when Fortey was penalised for stamping at a ruck, Gloucester were home and dry – just.

MATCH FACTS.

WORCESTER: T. Delport; D. O'Leary (S. Kapu 60) (B. Gollings 77), D. Rasmussen, T. Lombard, B. Hinshelwood; J. Brown, M. Powell; T. Windo (S. Sparks 72), A. van Niekerk (B. Daly 20), C. Horsman (L. Fortey 78), T. Collier (S. Vaili 66), C. Gillies, M. Gabey, P. Sanderson (c), D. Hickey.

Other rep.: C. Stuart-Smith.

GLOUCESTER: J. Goodridge; M. Garvey, T. Fanolua, H. Paul, J. Simpson-Daniel; D. McRae, A. Gomarsall; C. Bezuidenhout (T. Sigley 60), O. Azam (C. Fortey 60), G. Powell (P. Vickery 40), P. Buxton (A. Eustace 65), A. Brown, J. Boer (capt.), A. Hazell, A. Balding.

Other reps.: A. Page, J. Bailey, J. Forrester.

REFEREE: R. Maybank (RFU)

ATTENDANCE: 8,401

STAR MAN: Henry Paul.

Not only on hand to score a try that started Gloucester's comeback but his midfield defence against Pat Sanderson was outstanding.

TIMELINE.

TWO MINUTES: From a quick penalty, Olivier Azam dives forward and Duncan McRae drops a goal.

Worcester 0, Gloucester 3

12 MINUTES: Jon Goodridge gathers a kick from Matt Powell but the ball shoots out of the ruck and Tony Windo runs in to score from 20 metres. James Brown converts.

Worcester 7, Gloucester 3

19 MINUTES: Henry Paul kicks a penalty after Chris Horsman is penalised for offside.

Worcester 7, Gloucester 6

42 MINUTES: Brown nudged Worcester further ahead with a penalty.

Worcester 10, Gloucester 6

49 MINUTES: A sweeping move is finished off by Henry Paul who converts his try.

Worcester 10, Gloucester 13

53 MINUTES: McRae's kick is chased down by Goodridge who slides in to score. Paul misses the conversion.

Worcester 10, Gloucester 18

65 MINUTES: Brown lands another penalty after Peter Buxton is penalised for bringing Mark Gaby down in the line-out.

Worcester 13, Gloucester 18