

THE CITIZEN

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2004

GLOUCESTER ROMP TO EURO GLORY

FORTEY AT SHARP END IN FIERCE PACK BATTLE

SUPERB HOOKER PUTS IN A MATCH-WINNING DISPLAY
AGAINST ULSTER

GLOUCESTER 55 ULSTER 13

By general rule of thumb, hookers win rugby matches about as often as there are uncontroversial presidential elections in the United States, but the bullet-head features of Chris Fortey ensured it was a downright miserable afternoon for Ulster on Saturday.

There are precious few practitioners of that dark and ruthless trade who can be termed match-winners; Sean Fitzpatrick and Uli Schmidt for sure, Keith Wood almost certainly and Steve Thompson perhaps, but Chris Fortey? There is surely some mistake.

But he had the time of his life against the Ulstermen in this Heineken Cup dust-up and enjoyed the status as Gloucester's arch bovver boy.

He has never been shy in pouring a gallon of petrol on already flammable situations in the past and would enjoy an exceedingly short career as a diplomat, but he was at the heart of a thoroughly dominant home forward performance that swept Gloucester to a half-century score and a bonus point to boot.

By the sheer nature of his position, Fortey spends most of his working life in the dark, emerging only to throw into line-outs or earn a lecture from the referee, but here he was rampant from the re-starts, a no-holds barred pain in the rear end at the breakdown and supreme at the set-piece.

He even managed to resume full metal jacket intensity after smashing his head into a teak-tough Irishman at the contact area and losing his whereabouts by joining the very next scrum – which appeared all in a day's work for a man who learned the tastier arts of rucking and mauling at primary school.

But it was a gesture that summed up his determination, attitude and sheer desperation for the cause.

Fortey, in the side on merit to give some set-piece shape, enjoyed virtual line-out mastery that established guaranteed primary possession and also relieved some of the burden clouding Alex Brown in the middle of the line.

The second row is severely hampered by an arm injury and Gloucester required the variety in Fortey's game against the telescopic hands of Gary Longwell and Matt McCullough.

The contest was feverishly contested by the forwards and Gloucester had greater numbers in the piranha pool, but this was anything but a 50-point walloping.

It was tough and tense throughout, physical as only the Heineken Cup can be, and required every ounce of Andy Hazell's seek and destroy powers, who was once again sensational at openside, Phil Vickery's menacing at scrum-time and Christo Bezuidenhout's cool, calculated approach to the muckier side of the game.

Ulster will curse the fact that they made too many errors and although they attempted to play some rugby, they could not match Gloucester's greater variety.

There was not a 40-point chasm between the teams, although the scoreline should do wonders for Kingsholm confidence in the coming weeks.

In truth, Ulster had nothing much to fear trailing as they did 19-13 approaching the break – a sublime piece of footballing artistry by David Humphreys creating the space for the try he would score – but he had already turned to something approaching villain when Duncan McRae picked him off in midfield and belted 60 metres to score.

But when he dropped a low pass in front of his own posts, McRae traded passes with Henry Paul and Jon Goodridge swept to the line in the one seriously outstanding move of the entire contest.

The other piece of critically acclaimed rugby was James Simpson-Daniel's thunderous tackle on Kevin Maggs that prevented a certain Ulster score in the second half – a tackle that confirmed his defensive capabilities are increasing by the week.

But fortified by their second score, Gloucester's bloodhounds never looked back.

After driving a line-out a serious distance at the start of the second half – to the delight of the industrious James Forrester – the home side set about claiming their bonus point.

Try three arrived when Forrester's athletic reach at the tail of the line set up another rolling maul and Bezuidenhout, who had his best game yet, dipped a shoulder to claim the score.

More bad news was to follow for Humphreys in the third quarter when Simpson-Daniel, lurking with intent, sniffed out another long, arching pass to gallop away for touchdown number four and establish a Gloucester lead of 36-13.

They will be thankful for Ulster's generosity because at times Gloucester caused themselves no end of grief entirely of their own making that will cost them dearly against sharper opponents.

But this result was never in doubt despite the best efforts of skipper Andy Ward, as Ulster's pack were seriously busted.

Although Gloucester lost McRae on a stretcher to a serious-looking neck injury that will keep him out of the trip to Leicester on Saturday, the home side were sufficiently in control to introduce Nathan Mauger and James Bailey later on.

Adam Balding also caused a stir during his brief cameo appearance, charging forward to gather a bouncing kick before sending Marcel Garvey to the line with a pass Simpson-Daniel would have been proud of, prior to bagging the sixth score in the 90th minute from short range.

The victory leaves Gloucester on course to launch a chase against Stade Francais and although they will be disappointed the French side earned a bonus point against Cardiff, it should not be beyond Jake Boer and Co. to do the same in back-to-back meetings in December.

Gloucester are off and running in Europe and that is something they can all be thankful for.

GLOUCESTER: J. Goodridge; M. Garvey, T. Fanolua (J. Bailey 68), H. Paul, J. Simpson-Daniel; D. McRae (N. Mauger 50), A. Gomarsall; C. Bezuidenhout, C. Fortey (O. Azam 68, C. Fortey 82), P. Vickery (capt.), (G. Powell 70), A. Eustace (M. Cornwell 65), A. Brown (A. Balding 70), P. Buxton, A. Hazell, J. Forrester.

ULSTER: B. Cunningham; T. Bowe, K. Maggs, P. Steinmetz, T. Howe; D. Humphries (P. Wallace 65, A. Larkin 75), N. Doak (K. Campbell 75); S. Best, N. Brady (P. Shields 44), R. Moore, G. Longwell (R. Frost 44), M. McCullough, A. Ward (capt.) (C. Feather 84), N. Best (R. McCormack 78), R. Wilson.

REFEREE : E. Darriere (France).

ATTENDANCE: 12, 487.

TIMELINE

TWO MINUTES: Henry Paul penalty.
Gloucester 3, Ulster 0

EIGHT MINUTES: Paul penalty.
Gloucester 6 Ulster 0

14 MINUTES: Paul penalty.
Gloucester 9, Ulster 0

16 MINUTES: David Humphreys penalty.
Gloucester 9, Ulster 3

25 MINUTES: Humphreys try and conversion.
Gloucester 9, Ulster 10

33 MINUTES: Paul penalty.
Gloucester 12, Ulster 10

35 MINUTES: Duncan McRae try, Paul conversion.
Gloucester 19, Ulster 10

40 (plus 2) MINUTES: Humphreys penalty.
Gloucester 19, Ulster 13

40 (plus 4) MINUTES: Jon Goodridge try, Paul conversion.
Gloucester 26, Ulster 13

45 MINUTES: Paul drop-goal.
Gloucester 29, Ulster 13

54 MINUTES: Christo Bezuidenhout try, Paul conversion.
Gloucester 36, Ulster 13

56 MINUTES: James Simpson-Daniel try, Paul conversion.
Gloucester 43, Ulster 13

80 MINUTES: Marcel Garvey try, Paul conversion.
Gloucester 50, Ulster 13

80 MINUTES (plus 8): Adam Balding try.
Gloucester 55, Ulster 13

JC