

THE CITIZEN

MONDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2004

GLOUCESTER BOOST CAUSE IN A BLOODY BATTLE

BALDING AND GOMARSALL EXCEL TO LEAVE CARDIFF
WITH BAD CASE OF THE BLUES

CARDIFF BLUES 16 GLOUCESTER 23

Just for a change, Gloucester find themselves locked in a Heineken Cup pool with the most complicated mathematics.

But their second successive victory over Cardiff had nothing to do with the complexities of Pythagoras, although he could probably figure out their requirements in a flash, but everything to do with physical confrontation and a large expression of public disorder.

This was a near-the-knuckle dose of regional blood-letting that meant the only thing apart from points worth counting were the number of grim faces trotting off to the cooler for a variety of offences that typified the jarring nature of the contest.

The Blues coach David Young, a triple Lions tourist and hardly a veteran of front row piety, admitted a second successive defeat felt like a 'smack in the chops.'

It may have taken roughly 70 minutes for the whole thing to erupt but when it did, spite flowed by the bucketload.

John Yapp and Adam Eustace went at it in serious fashion, the two Powells – Ryan of Cardiff and Gary of Gloucester – will not be spending a lengthy period of time in each other's company any time soon, and when Deiniol Jones, a home-town lock, aimed a cheap shot at Jake Boer at a ruck, it was the cue for everybody to take up arms.

But while Jones was dispatched for a rest, Boer somehow remained on the field and his side closed out a determined victory.

Gloucester might lose the odd game here and there but they do not come second in too many fights.

"We've taken huge steps up in these games against Gloucester, but the negatives still hit you smack in the chops," Young said.

Cardiff may be everybody's fools in the Celtic League, but they are a vastly different proposition in Europe on their own turf and had they possessed a semblance of attacking nerve at the end of the first half, they may have asked more questions than they did.

The trouble for Cardiff is that apart from a smattering of seriously top-notch performers – Tom Shanklin, Gethin Jenkins and Martyn Williams to name three – they don't add up to much.

And where they produced more than the sum of their parts at Kingsholm in a rousing performance nine days ago, Gloucester handed out a physical beating of their own here and demonstrated a ruthless streak that is honed in the Zurich Premiership to close the gap on pool leaders Stade Francais to a measly point.

You are unlikely to go too far in Europe if overlaps the width of the River Taff go begging and had either Rhys or Martyn Williams seen a host of blue bodies outnumbering Gloucester's defence on the stroke of half-time following a terrific attack initiated by scrum-half Ryan Powell, the Blues could have produced something out of the ordinary.

But where the hosts were exactly that, ordinary, Gloucester scored two tries of contrasting excellence and had any number of crows patrolling the deep waters of a contest that was savagely competitive throughout to make the most of their opportunities.

The most difficult test now would appear to be away at Ravenhill in the next round – the home of Ulster – who upset Stade to put themselves back in the qualification picture with a priceless victory that drives a wedge into the qualifying dilemma.

However, if the likes of the remarkable Adam Balding maintains his blistering form, Andy Gomarsall re-forms his half-back pairing with Duncan McRae and they continue to score tries like the quality on show here, they are capable of doing real damage.

Balding is operating at high temperature just now. His approach work smacked of real quality, he is seriously disruptive in and around the contact area and carried the ball a dozen times in a performance that glowed with hard-edged class.

Gomarsall was also terrific, providing McRae with excellent service, kicking far better than he did a week earlier, and his two try-saving tackles on Lee Thomas and Fereti Tuilagi either side of half-time were absolutely crucial.

His experience and know-how in the top three inches were critical when the game lost shape and when tempers blew up in the final quarter as he demonstrated why he has become England's first choice scrum-half.

But by then, the game was won. Gloucester built on Cardiff's poor discipline and two lovely tries to snatch the points. The first, ironically, came when they were under pressure with James Forrester in the sinbin for killing the ball inside the second quarter.

However, Gomarsall shifted clean line-out ball into midfield and Garvey kicked out of Craig Morgan's tackle and did the rest of the Cardiff defence for pace for a brilliant try.

From Gloucester's point of view, it was a piece of killer finishing but Cardiff's tackling was desperate.

The second, 10 minutes after the re-start, was just as good, although Cardiff were sure Gloucester crossed in midfield before a forward pass also crept into the move.

Garvey and Boer sustained the pressure down the right and when they recycled to the left, McRae's brilliant little roller was picked up by the galloping legs of Jon Goodridge to score.

Gloucester were ahead 14-6 and if not quite home and hosed, certainly on their way.

They built on Cardiff's disciplinary problems, scrummaged well and got stuck in at the line-out thanks to the returning excellence of Alex Brown as Paul kicked them to a commanding lead that should have been better had Goodridge's second try not been cancelled out because of the first punch-up.

Craig Morgan did get a late try for Cardiff but it was nothing more than a consolation as Gloucester's monumental travelling support chorused a rousing, if bloody, European victory.

CARDIFF: R. Williams; F. Tuilagi, S. James, T. Shanklin, C. Morgan; L. Thomas, R. Powell; G. Jenkins, R. Thomas (G. Williams 78), M. Jones (G. Yapp 55), D. Jones, R. Sidoli, N. Thomas (M. Sowden-Taylor 67), M. Williams (capt.), K. Schubert.

GLOUCESTER: J. Goodridge; M. Garvey, T. Fanolua (N. Mauger 62), H. Paul, J. Bailey; D. McRae, A. Gomarsall; C. Bezuidenhout, J. Parkes, G. Powell, A. Eustace, M. Cornwell (A. Brown 45), J. Forrester (P. Buxton 75), J. Boer (capt.), A. Balding.

STAR MAN: ADAM BALDING.

REFEREE: A. Lewis (Ire).

ATTENDANCE: 10,186.

TIMELINE:

27 MINUTES: Lee Thomas penalty.
Cardiff 3, Gloucester 0

31 MINUTES: James Forrester yellow card. Thomas penalty.
Cardiff 6, Gloucester 0

39 MINUTES: Marcel Garvey try, Henry Paul conversion.
Cardiff 6, Gloucester 7

50 MINUTES: Jon Goodridge try, Paul conversion.
Cardiff 6, Gloucester 14

56 MINUTES: Thomas penalty.
Cardiff 9, Gloucester 14

64 MINUTES: Paul penalty.
Cardiff 9, Gloucester 17

67 MINUTES: Paul penalty.
Cardiff 9, Gloucester 20

70 MINUTES: Gary Powell yellow card.

74 MINUTES: Deiniol Jones yellow card. Paul penalty.
Cardiff 9, Gloucester 23

77 MINUTES: Craig Morgan try. Thomas conversion.
Cardiff 16, Gloucester 23