

# THE CITIZEN

MONDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2004

CUP VICTORY FAILS TO MASK A DOUR DISPLAY

HOOKER DAVIES SHINES AS GLOUCESTER EDGE WIN

IN UNINSPIRING TIGERS TIE

LEICESTER 13 GLOUCESTER 20

LEICESTER : S. Vesty; A. Tuilagi, L. Lloyd, O. Smith, T. Varndell; R. Broadfoot (R. Warren 59), S. Bernard; M. Holford, G. Chuter (E. Taukata 75), D. Morris, J. Hamilton, B. Kay (capt.), B. Deacon, L. Moody, W. Johnson.

GLOUCESTER : J. Goodridge; M. Garvey, N. Mauger, H. Paul, S. Kiole; B. Davies, A. Gomarsall; C. Bezuidenhout, M. Davies, G. Powell, A. Eustace (P. Buxton 49), A. Brown, J. Boer (capt.), A. Hazell (J. Forrester 61), A. Balding.

REFEREE : A. Rowden (RFU).

ATTENDANCE : 9,902

No victory at Welford Road is ever run-of-the-mill but you could have been forgiven for thinking Dean Ryan had discovered a direct family bloodline to Jeremy Beadle, rather than having earned a cup victory at Leicester on Saturday.

His mood was so dark as to be almost suicidal. He was in the frame of mind for a laugh in much the same way as turkeys enjoy their nether regions stuffed with sage and onion at this time of year.

It is doubtful whether his mood could have been blacker had Gloucester actually gone out of the Powergen Cup, because this victory was distinctly hollow – and that had as much to do with the sub-standard nature of his own side's performance as to the viability of a tournament for the top clubs that means this contest barely registered on the conscience.

The domestic cup has been overtaken in importance by the stratospheric demands of the Heineken Cup and the relentless thud of the Premiership – competitions with heart and soul.

In comparison, Saturday's get-together between two of the biggest draws in the business barely registered a blip on the radar. It is simply impossible to maintain the level of performance we have become accustomed to on three fronts, particularly after back-to-back European flings that were played at international pitch by both of these institutions.

But the main concern for Ryan and Nigel Melville was that for the vast proportion of the contest, Gloucester were flat and unimaginative. They won because they had more experience and made the most of their chances but you can guarantee when these two meet again in the Premiership in a fortnight, the contest will be red in both tooth and claw.

There were some encouraging performances to lift the gloom and they came from players with the least experience in Cherry and White colours. And if they get a favourable draw today, they may just fancy a little tilt at Twickenham.

No victory at Leicester can be under-rated and in perhaps the most difficult stretch of the season, this success should act as a major boost to confidence.

Hooker Mefin Davies had an absolute blinder, threw into the line-out with almost total conviction despite the fact he has been in Gloucester employment for less than a week, got around the field brilliantly and tackled considerably above his weight.

The other to catch the eye was Seti Kiole – the Tongan wing with alleged family connections to Jonah Lomu. One over-the-shoulder catch, turn and charge from Ross Broadfoot's angled kick left Alex Tuilagi's innards rearranged and the only thing he needs now is a touch of space in which to plough his considerable frame.

Andy Gomarsall also worked his socks off but Gloucester had been so clueless up until half-time, it looked seriously doubtful whether they had the wherewithal to beat a Leicester side featuring 10 changes from the one that dismembered Wasps in Europe six days previously.

They even gifted Tigers a try inside the second quarter when Tom Varndell chased through to scamper after Leon Lloyd's angled chip, mugged Marcel Garvey – who clearly thought the ball would run dead – hacked past Jon Goodridge and won the foot race to score from halfway.

But neither team played with much lustre, and it took until 10 minutes after the break for Gloucester to finally get their noses in front.

When Brett Deacon was dispatched to the cooler for the kind of mischief Leicester had made a speciality over the years around the breakdown, Gloucester drove a series of line-outs close and over the line.

A combination of Pete Buxton and the mighty presence of Adam Balding, playing with real conviction just now, got the ball over the line and referee Ashley Rowden awarded a penalty try.

Leicester can have few complaints because Rowden gave them plenty of warning. They never recovered from the score.

They had been as physical as humanly possible but far too blunt to seriously test a defence of Gloucester's capabilities, and the visitors stole the game with the sort of score that summed up the contest.

Brad Davies, far more assured at stand-off than on his previous visit to Welford Road, aimed a high kick towards Robert Warren, the replacement full-back. He looked distinctly uncomfortable at the mere thought of having to take the catch under pressure from Alex Brown and Paul.

Brown got there at roughly the same time as Lewis Moody and appeared to knock the ball substantially forward, but Paul played on and sent Nathan Mauger in for the try with the Leicester cover nowhere to be seen.

Ten points ahead, Gloucester looked to close out the game and did so with the minimum of fuss, despite a late Leicester rally that allowed Sam West to shave the gap to seven points.

John Wells, their sense-talking coach, said afterwards: "I would have been more disappointed with the defeat had we not beaten London Wasps in the Heineken Cup over the last two weeks.

"I think the players will be disappointed, because I don't think the game was beyond their abilities.

"There were a lot of young kids that had points to prove, but I don't think, as a side, we adapted to the conditions like Gloucester did.

"I've got no complaints about the result – Gloucester deserved to win, let's hope they go on and win it."

#### TIMELINE:

10 MINUTES : Henry Paul penalty.  
Leicester 0, Gloucester 3.

37 MINUTES : Tom Varndell try, Ross Broadfoot conversion.  
Leicester 7 Gloucester 3.

45 MINUTES : Paul penalty.  
Leicester 7 Gloucester 6.

48 MINUTES : Broadfoot penalty.  
Leicester 10 Gloucester 6.

56 MINUTES :Brett Deacon yellow card.

58 MINUTES : Gloucester penalty try, Paul conversion.  
Leicester 10 Gloucester 13.

61 MINUTES : Nathan Mauger try, Paul conversion.  
Leicester 10 Gloucester 20.

74 MINUTES : Sam Vesty penalty.  
Leicester 13, Gloucester 20.

STAR MAN : Mefin Davies.

JC