

THE CITIZEN

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2004

FORRESTER STAKES MASSIVE CLAIM FOR JERSEY

GLOUCESTER'S DEFENCE IS WORN DOWN BY WASPS SIDE
IN DEVASTATING FORM

WASPS 33 GLOUCESTER 20

James Forrester has for some time been regarded as one of the greatest free spirits in the deep, murky waters inhabited by the majority of breakaway loose forwards, but his extravagant talents have been used so sparingly this season he has almost disappeared off the radar.

Blessed with the long-distance support gifts of a young Michael Jones and the freakish ability to weave in and out of gaps that are designed to rearrange his innards, the loose-limbed number eight offers something gloriously different to the back row canvas and had anyone else in Cherry and White colours displayed his amount of quick-thinking, eye for a gap and finishing quality yesterday, Gloucester may have come away from Wasps with something to show for their troubles.

Forrester was once again restricted to a 26-minute cameo – distinctly long enough to suggest his talents go much further than merely warming his behind on the bench – a thought echoed by Warren Gatland, the Wasps director of rugby.

And while he might not crumble opposition attackers like man-eaters Jake Boer or Adam Balding and does not possess the gun dog instincts of Andy Hazell at the breakdown, his running lines are a dream, he is capable of scoring ludicrously good tries, has pace to burn and provided Gloucester's attacking threat with a much-needed cutting edge against the envelope tightness of the Wasps defence.

His angled break away from Rob Hoadley after Henry Paul's mugging of Tom Voyce deep in the final quarter was one indication of his glorious talents, while his chip and chase in the final throws of a game Wasps thoroughly dominated could have yielded a late bonus point had the bounce and an arm not impeded his follow-up.

Andy Deacon, a forward from the sharper end of the action and a man whose career yardage after 15 years in the top flight is still in single figures compared to Forrester's acreage, is so convinced by the 23-year-old's multi-faceted qualities that he believes he demands instant inclusion.

"I think he should be in the starting XV no matter what, because he is a quality player and for the life of me I don't know why he doesn't start," Deacon said.

"He is creative, sees things and when the game gets stretched, he is capable of hurting people with his pace."

Gatland, the Wasps chief who watched his side dominate, added: "I cannot believe he doesn't start week in, week out. He made a big difference when he came on. Apart from him, I didn't think they created very much at all."

Forrester is often sacrificed for bulk away from home – but Wasps smothered everything Gloucester hurled at them yesterday, muscle and all – carving out a thoroughly deserved victory that will further dent Kingsholm confidence.

They created their pressure by keeping the ball through a huge amount of phases, pressed for defensive weaknesses and simply wore down the defence.

Gloucester did defend with a huge amount of willingness and appreciable skill, but the home side played at a notch or two higher throughout.

Gloucester's Nigel Melville and Dean Ryan were furious at two sinbinnings for Paul and Christo Bezuidenhout in the second half that robbed them of momentum but there is no doubting that Wasps thoroughly deserved their victory.

Despite a fierce contribution from Adam Eustace, a tight forward who was genuinely competitive, Gloucester simply failed to keep the ball long enough in dangerous areas to get their game-breakers into the threatening areas of the field.

Wasps had far more big names playing with big game attitudes. Matt Dawson was a menace throughout, the under-rated Richard Birkett had a stormer, Lawrence Dallaglio went 10 to the dozen – with his mouth as well as arms and legs – and the wonderful Jonny O'Connor got through an endless amount of work.

He got their first try after seven minutes, the result of a poor Andy Gomarsall box kick and a driven line-out close to the line that allowed the number seven to squeeze over from a ruck.

Gloucester simply turned the ball over too often and although the line-out functioned well and the scrum held up manfully under pressure with the returning Terry Sigley, who tried his hardest, Wasps operated with plenty of possession.

They were only 10-9 ahead when they scored again after Dawson exposed a dozing Seti Kiole, who had not pressurised a quick line-out with the required chase. Dawson snapped blind, fed the ever industrious O'Connor in support, Will Green offered a helping hand and Josh Lewsey dived in to score.

Wasps led 20-12 at the break and kept themselves sufficiently in front throughout the second half until Forrester's late smash and grab raid.

We will never know whether a long burst from the number eight may have changed the match, but Gatland was happy he sat out the majority on the bench.

Gloucester simply could not get the ball in the right areas for long enough to eat into the lead, while Wasps will be disappointed not to have won a bonus point as they did everything bar secure one.

It looked a distinct possibility when, after a series of phases, Dallaglio and Mark van Gisbergen combined with long passes to put Simon Shaw in at the right corner for try number three.

Gloucester were simply too far adrift to stage a meaningful comeback, despite Paul's excellent kicking and Forrester's try. Wasps look a genuine Premiership threat to Leicester on this evidence, while Gloucester still have work to do.

WASPS: M. van Gisbergen; J. Lewsey, P. Richards, S. Abbot (R. Hoadley 74), T. Voyce; A. King (J. Brookes 74), M. Dawson (H. Biljon 74); C. Dowd, B. Gotting, W. Green (A. McKenzie 74), S. Shaw, R. Birkett (J. Hart 78), J. Worsley, J. O'Connor, L. Dallaglio (capt.).

GLOUCESTER: J. Goodridge (J. Bailey 78); M. Garvey, T. Fanolua, H. Paul, S. Kiole; B. Davies (N. Mauger 40), A. Gomarsall; C. Bezuidenhout (N. Wood 62), M. Davies, T. Sigley, A. Eustace (P. Buxton 62), A. Brown, J. Boer (capt.), A. Hazell (J. Forrester 54), A. Balding.

STAR MAN: Adam Eustace

REFEREE: R. Maybank (RFU).

ATTENDANCE: 10,000

TIMELINE:

SEVEN MINUTES: Jonny O'Connor try. Mark van Gisbergen conversion.
Wasps 7, Gloucester 0

11 MINUTES: Henry Paul penalty.
Wasps 7, Gloucester 3

13 MINUTES: van Gisbergen penalty.
Wasps 10, Gloucester 3

24 MINUTES: Paul penalty.
Wasps 10, Gloucester 6

27 MINUTES: Paul penalty.
Wasps 10. Gloucester 9

30 MINUTES: Josh Lewsey try. van Gisbergen conversion.
Wasps 17, Gloucester 9

38 MINUTES: Paul penalty.
Wasps 17, Gloucester 12

40 MINUTES (PLUS 2): van Gisbergen penalty.
Wasps 20, Gloucester 12

43 MINUTES: van Gisbergen penalty.
Wasps 23, Gloucester 12

45 MINUTES: Paul penalty.
Wasps 23, Gloucester 15

53 MINUTES: Paul yellow card, van Gisbergen penalty.
Wasps 26, Gloucester 15

57 MINUTES: Christo Bezuidenhout yellow card.

71 MINUTES: Simon Shaw try, van Gisbergen penalty[*sic*].
Wasps 33, Gloucester 15

76 MINUTES: James Forrester try.
Wasps 33, Gloucester 20