

GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECHO

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**SENIORITY RULES IN WEST COUNTRY CUP CONFLICT
BRISTOL FORWARDS MAKE GLOUCESTER WORK HARD
FOR QUARTER-FINAL VICTORY
GLOUCESTER 21 BRISTOL 0**

Micky 'Never Stay Down' Burton and Mike 'The Greek' Fry would surely have loved it to bits.

This was a bout of M5 antagonism strictly for grown-ups that had everything to do with west country one-upmanship and the potential for a Powergen Cup shock and little to do with anything fancy, frivolous and faint-hearted.

As forceful as humanly possible and supremely well served by the likes of the exemplary Jim Brownrigg – a lightweight number eight but a footballer of considerable skill – breakaway Joe El Abd, a real handful on the openside and Dave Hilton, a journeyman prop with more tricks up his front row sleeve than Paul Daniels, and it is easy to appreciate how Bristol caused so much disruption.

Throw in a set-piece that was also far from outgunned and a ferocious start that caused more than one or two palpitations in Gloucester hearts and it is not hard to appreciate Richard Hill's satisfaction at Bristol's effort.

In fact, the solids may well have hit the fan had Rob Higgitt and Marko Stanojevic not botched up a highly presentable scoring opportunity inside the first five minutes down the short side that should have handed the visitors a try.

"They were everything we thought they would be," said Gloucester's coach and former Bristol man Dean Ryan.

"For the first 20-odd minutes, they caused us severe disruption and created problems for us.

"I hope they continue to improve because they are a big club. We had to work hard for that and they tested us every step of the way."

With the dynamic El Abd hunting well at the business end with his near-the-knuckle instincts at the contact area, Brownrigg manœuvring possession with real quality considering the conditions and Ollie Hodge slugging it out in the line-out, the crocs in the Gloucester pack had a red raw battle on their hands simply to rule the swamp.

But rule it they did, just. Jake Boer defused any number of Bristol advances with his blue-collar efforts in the first half of genuine quality.

Adam Eustace dragged players by his sheer spirit and forcefulness of attitude and Andy Hazell launched himself at blue and white raiders with typical whole-heartedness in another committed display.

Gloucester were also well directed by Andy Gomarsall at scrum-half, who was back to his busy and determined best, and after weathering Bristol's early bombardment, they played with a great deal of understanding and togetherness compared to the self-destruction against Stade Francais.

`But they still failed to control the ball with anything like the certainty demanded against better opposition and you wonder whether Gloucester would still be in the competition had this been against the all-round excellence of Wasps rather than a wound-up but limited Bristol side.

They are lacking genuine cutting edge in midfield and Bristol's pack did more damage than may have been expected against opponents who have searched for a meaningful platform for a number of weeks.

But the result was never in any doubt once Henry Paul had slotted penalties after 16, 25 and 32 minutes to establish a 9-0 half-time lead to draw the string from Bristol's early bombardment.

It took Gloucester until close to the 50th minute mark to get their first try and it was not something that pleased El Abd one tiny bit.

"I felt we matched them in most areas – certainly we weren't outmuscled by their forwards and if we hadn't conceded a pretty soft early try in the second half, we might have finished closer to them," he said, sporting the ravages of war.

Bristol had indeed pinched one against the head on a defensive scrum close to their line, but Gomarsall reacted quickest when the ball shot out the back and touched down to score behind an entirely befuddled Ross Blake, the Bristol number nine.

Gomarsall was in need of a high quality performance ahead of the RBS 6 Nations Championship with both Matt Dawson and Harry Ellis in excellent form and he got stuck in good and proper here.

He took a fearful smack in the eye shortly after scoring and headed towards the tunnel for treatment, where he promptly collided with a security guard and then slammed himself straight into a metal post.

Considering his discomfort, Gomarsall returned to wrap things up for Gloucester with a second try 10 minutes from time. His intelligent chip confused the back-peddalling Adam Billig and Alex Brown slid in to score.

The width of the margin did not flatter Gloucester but they are certainly far from well just now.

Their pack is not functioning with the kind of cold steel savagery associated with men from Kingsholm and they are struggling to get into an effective attacking stride.

But Nigel Melville, Gloucester's hugely relieved director of rugby, was just pleased to have registered a victory.

"We needed a win, more so this week than for a while. Anybody who lives locally and who cares about Gloucester rugby will know what I am saying," Melville said.

"We know we didn't perform last week. We don't need to be reminded of that. But this game couldn't have come soon enough.

"Doubt does creep in but we have stuck together and it feels great to have a victory again."

GLOUCESTER: J. Goodridge; M. Garvey, T. Fanolua, H. Paul, S. Kiole; D. McRae, A. Gomarsall (A. Page 78); C. Bezuidenhout (N. Wood 74), M. Davies, T. Sigley, A. Eustace (P. Buxton 67), A. Brown, J. Boer (capt.), A. Hazell (J. Forrester 76), A. Balding.

BRISTOL: S. Marsden (J. Pritchard 70); M. Stanojevic, R. Higgitt, S. Cox, L. Nabaro (A. Billig 68); J. Strange, R. Blake; D. Hilton, S. Nelson (N. Clark 57), J. Hobson (A. Clarke 64), E. Pearce (O. Kohn 62), O. Hodge, C. Morgan (R. Martin-Redman 57), J. El Abd (capt.), J. Brownrigg.

REFEREE : S. Lander (RFU).

ATTENDANCE : 13,000

16 MINUTES: Henry Paul penalty.
Gloucester 3, Bristol 0

25 MINUTES: Paul penalty.
Gloucester 6, Bristol 0

32 MINUTES: Paul penalty.
Gloucester 9, Bristol 0

47 MINUTES: Andy Gomarsall try, Paul conversion.
Gloucester 16, Bristol 0.

70 MINUTES: Alex Brown try, Gloucester 21, Bristol 0.

STAR MAN: Jake Boer.

JC