

GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECHO

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**DAVIES DOES THE DAMAGE FOR GLOUCESTER
BRILLIANT BRAD BOOTS CHERRY AND WHITES
TO A FAMOUS BATH VICTORY
GLOUCESTER 17 BATH 16**

Whatever Brad Davies subsequently achieves in his rugby career, and there should be plenty of good days ahead of him yet, the moment he drop-kicked his home town club to a jaw-dropping victory against their fiendishly disruptive neighbours from Bath may just top the list.

This was a High Noon showdown red in both tooth and claw, thoroughly dominated by two sets of forwards operating at near hysteria, which was sliding into injury-time with the blue half of the dispute leading by two priceless points.

Bath, without a brass farthing to call their own in a back division that resembled a virtual kindergarten, had been remarkably well served by youngsters Ryan Davis and Tom Cheeseman in the centre and the more experienced Chris Malone, who had the wherewithal to get his plug-ugly brigade up front operating on the go-forward.

John Connolly's men were no less hampered at the sharp end either due to a raft of injuries to key personnel in the front and back row.

But with Matt Stevens, Danny Grewcock and the outstanding Geraint Lewis in scintillating form, Bath had constructed a slender advantage through Malone's expert kicking and a soft try from James Scaysbrook to close in on a cherished victory.

Gloucester, simmering away with an equal amount of desperation and intensity that had been missing in high profile defeats against Stade Francais and Harlequins, clung to life deep inside their own half before winning a penalty after an offence by Gareth Delve.

But without Henry Paul, their recognised kicker and chief playmaker who had already limped off with an ankle injury, Andy Gomarsall launched a monster touch-finder 50 metres down field to buy more position than anyone in a red shirt could have hoped for.

A Gloucester body was then located at the tail of the line-out by another expert throw from Mefin Davies and the Cherry and White invaders summoned enough spirit for one last, furious effort.

Both Adam Balding, a remarkable competitor on the flank and James Simpson-Daniel, had goes at piercing Bath's defence before referee Dave Pearson signalled a Gloucester penalty.

Gomarsall played on and Pearson could have withdrawn the decision had the phase of play continued without producing what happened next.

Davies, only on the field for two minutes and yet to have a meaningful touch of the ball, stood 35 metres away from the posts, in the pocket for a drop-goal, when Gomarsall shifted him possession.

His connection was perfect and the flight true, arcing the ball fractionally inside the left post to spark a deafening period of noise and scenes of celebration not seen at Kingsholm for years.

"I was screaming at Gomars 'give me the ball, give me the ball' but I was not sure if he would," Davies said afterwards. "I was in the position for a drop-goal and I just couldn't ask for anything more to be honest.

"I think we deserved to win. I was just glad it went over – it's fantastic. It's not sunk in yet and I am just glad I could play a part in it.

"To be honest, I was not sure what was happening because Henry just ran off. I didn't have a lot of time think about what was happening.

"I knew I had two bites at it but I was just hoping the drop-goal went over because I would have been a bit worried about taking that penalty at the end."

Davies is an unassuming, likeable man who has not always found life in the Premiership's choppy waters easy. But this victory will do wonders to his confidence and mean more to Gloucester than any this season.

Bath will wonder just how they lost it considering they could have scored four tries never mind one, but Gloucester's sheer bloody-mindedness would not be denied and they scrapped and tackled themselves to a standstill.

The tone was set from the kick-off when Terry Fanolua up-ended a poor unfortunate with the sort of tackle that does serious damage to mind and body and was penalised for not using his arms.

It was a typical frantic start. When Andy Hazell was not invading space to cut Malone or Zak Feaunati off at the waist or the superlative Alex Brown was doing his stuff in the line-out under immense pressure from Grewcock and Steve Borthwick, Paul and Simpson-Daniel were running threatening angles and looking sharp.

And it was a lovely movement from Paul after 14 minutes that created the opening try. He spun through a midfield tackle and sent Simpson-Daniel away into vast open acres.

His pass to Seti Kiole opened Bath up further and his offload allowed Fanolua to batter past Cheeseman and Andy Williams for a sensational try.

Bath are nothing but durable these days and when Gloucester attempted to play themselves out of trouble from a scrum, they conceded a soft try.

Bath kept possession from a close-range line-out and Scaysbrook hurdled a mound of bodies from a ruck to score.

Without their anarchist-in-chief Phil Vickery, who had smashed his forearm, Bath were the better side for the majority of the contest and Gloucester clung on through the efforts of Balding, Brown, Hazell and Co., as Malone and Paul exchanged a series of penalties in classic shoot-out style.

In the end it all came down to Davies, who wrote his own piece of west country history.

GLOUCESTER : J. Goodridge; M. Garvey, J. Simpson-Daniel, T. Fanolua, S. Kiole; H. Paul (B. Davies 80), A. Gomarsall; N. Wood, M. Davies, P. Vickery (capt.) (T. Sigley 29), A. Eustace (P. Buxton 72), A. Brown, J. Forrester, A. Hazell, A. Balding.

BATH : M. Perry; A. Williams, T. Cheeseman, R. Davis, J. Maddock; C. Malone, N. Walshe; M. Stevens, L. Mears, D. Bell, S. Borthwick, D. Grewcock (R. Fidler 75), G. Lewis (G. Delve 75), J. Scaysbrook, Z. Feanati.

STAR MAN : Alex Brown.

REFEREE : S. Pearson (RFU)

ATTENDANCE : 13,000

14 MINUTES: Terry Fanolua try.
Gloucester 5, Bath 0.

35 MINUTES: James Scaysbrook try, Chris Malone conversion.
Gloucester 5, Bath 7.

37 MINUTES: Henry Paul penalty.
Gloucester 8, Bath 7.

40 MINUTES: Malone penalty.
Gloucester 8, Bath 10.

44 MINUTES: Paul penalty.
Gloucester 11, Bath 10.

50 MINUTES: Malone penalty.
Gloucester 11, Bath 13.

62 MINUTES: Paul penalty.
Gloucester 14, Bath 13.

65 MINUTES: Mefin Davies yellow card, Malone penalty.
Gloucester 14, Bath 16.

80 (plus 2) MINUTES: Brad Davies drop-goal.
Gloucester 17, Bath 16.

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