

GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECHO

MONDAY, MARCH 14, 2005

RYAN IS RAPIDLY RUNNING OUT OF PATIENCE

CHANGES IMMINENT AFTER GLOUCESTER ARE TAKEN APART

BY NORTHAMPTON

GLOUCESTER 18 NORTHAMPTON 26

Dean Ryan is one of the deeper thinkers among the English coaching fraternity and he will be dispensing uncomfortable home truths by the dozen this week.

Ryan never played for Gloucester, but he might as well have done, for he is Kingsholm man incarnate. The attachment to people and place has become so ingrained in his three-year association with the club that a really bad performance hurts and embarrasses him.

But Saturday's disintegration against Northampton, when his side lacked shape, direction and authority, is likely to be the final straw. If serious personnel changes are not made before Gloucester take the field in the Premiership again in a little under a fortnight, it will not be for the want of trying on Ryan's part.

He was so furious he could have spontaneously combusted. Gloucester have been ill since before Christmas but the question has to be asked: Are there sections in this Gloucester side who don't care? Or at the very least, do not care enough?

Last month, 14 Harlequins stuck the best part of 40 points on the Cherry and Whites to prompt a drastic overhaul of standards. But this, an even more public shellacking by a team one off the bottom in the Premiership, will be even harder to take.

The sight of hundreds of supporters streaming out of the ground with 10 minutes to go would only have twisted the knife further into Ryan's gullet and despite the contributions of Adam Balding, the ferociously competitive captain, the blue collar grafting of Jake Boer and a relentless effort from Mark Cornwell, there were parts of Gloucester's performance that were a shallow betrayal of their commitment.

Without a definitive shape to their game and the lack of a kicking option, Gloucester's effort caved in around the half-back pairing of Andy Gomarsall and Henry Paul. Paul's contribution can be measured in the fact that Gloucester scored twice in the last fifteen minutes with Brad Davies in the stand-off position, Paul's substitution brought one of the loudest cheers of the day – a cringingly mocking response to his performance.

Beforehand, the talk was of chasing down Sale to earn an automatic Heineken Cup place with a top three finish, but Gloucester are further away from that than at any stage of the season and unless they improve, could finish outside the top six.

Northampton, more than the sum of their parts, fully deserved four cherished Premiership points. Hounded by the thought of relegation – a possibility too bizarre to contemplate on this evidence – the Saints made a flying start and never looked back.

Two tries to the good after 18 minutes, they did their damage swiftly and clinically.

Combining the power of the four-square John Rudd and the quality distributional subtleties of Shane Drahm, Neil Starling cut a lovely angle to grab the first after 13 minutes before the stand-off sent Starling's centre partner Marc Stcherbina home for an even easier score five minutes later.

Defensively, Gloucester slipped off too many tackles that allowed Northampton to break the advantage line to find themselves almost out of the contest before it had begun.

And with Andrew Blowers patrolling the murky waters of the loose forward exchanges alongside Corne Krige, the Saints had enough about them to go in 14-6 ahead – Gloucester's points coming from the boot of Paul.

The home side did have their chances in the first half – the best when James Simpson-Daniel cut inside on a break but lost his footing and the move stumbled to an abrupt and undignified halt.

They also should have scored when Pete Buxton thundered up the middle after good work from Balding and Gomarsall but neither the scrum-half or Terry Sigley could wriggle free of the Northampton cover to score on the second wave of attack.

Gloucester simply do not win many matches without the expert control of Duncan McRae, their first choice stand-off and one of the sharpest brains in the game-shaping business.

They huffed and puffed in the third quarter and thought they had scored when Boer controlled the ball at the back of a line-out. Terry Fanolua then added his presence to the drive and was bundled over the line, only for the referee Dave Pearson to rule he had been held up and disallow the score.

For all their territorial dominance and then a man advantage when Blowers was packed off to the cooler for killing the ball after 61 minutes, Gloucester actually lost six points to two Drahm penalties to trail 23-6 with 10 minutes remaining.

It was too much for some. Amid a stream of cat-calls and a hail of vitriol raining down from the stands, Gloucester came to life with Davies at number 10.

With five minutes to go, they got a try when Gomarsall reacted quickest to a loose ball. Simpson-Daniel, as threatening as ever, put Nathan Mauger into space and Marcel Garvey – another who was hungry for work throughout – slid in to score in the far right corner.

In the last minutes, Gloucester scored again when Sigley rumbled on from Noel Curnier's quickly taken line-out. Fanolua came in to add support and Mauger went in to score.

It was probably more than Gloucester deserved but with Davies, Alex Page and loosie Luke Narraway on by the end, it may have been a sign of things to come for the rest of the season.

If Ryan has his way, the changes will be carried out at a stroke. Gloucester are close to the fold in the league and he has had enough – who can blame him ?

GLOUCESTER : J. Goodridge (N. Mauger 73); M. Garvey, J. Simpson-Daniel, T. Fanolua, S. Kiole; H. Paul (B. Davies 65), A. Gomarsall (A. Page 75); N. Wood (N. Curnier 80), N. Curnier (O. Azam 43), T. Sigley, A. Eustace (M. Cornwell 3), A. Brown, P. Buxton, J. Boer (L. Narraway 75), A. Balding (capt.).

NORTHAMPTON : B. Reihana; J. Rudd, N. Starling (A. Vilk 62), M. Stcherbina, W. Human; S. Drahm, J. Howard; S. Emms (B. Sturgess 46), D. Richmond, R. Morris, G. Seely (R. Beattie 73), D. Browne (A. Codling 63), A. Blowers, C. Krige (capt.), M. Soden.

STAR MAN : Mark Cornwell.

REFEREE : D. Pearson (RFU).

ATTENDANCE : 12,500.

13 MINUTES: Neil Starling try, Shane Drahm conversion.
Gloucester 0, Northampton 7.

18 MINUTES: Marc Stcherbina try, Drahm conversion.
Gloucester 0, Northampton 14.

21 MINUTES: Henry Paul penalty.
Gloucester 3, Northampton 14.

26 MINUTES: Paul penalty.
Gloucester 6, Northampton 14.

55 MINUTES: Drahm penalty.
Gloucester 6, Northampton 17.

64 MINUTES: Drahm penalty.
Gloucester 6, Northampton 20.

72 MINUTES: Drahm penalty.
Gloucester 6, Northampton 23.

75 MINUTES: Marcel Garvey try.
Gloucester 11, Northampton 23.

78 MINUTES: Drahm penalty,
Gloucester 11, Northampton 26.

79 MINUTES: Nathan Manger try, Brad Davies conversion.
Gloucester 18, Northampton 26.

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