

GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECHO

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**ROOKIES SET THE STANDARD IN SPIRITED WIN
PAGE AND DAVIES SHOW MATURITY IN PERFORMANCE
TO WARM RYAN'S HEART**

LONDON IRISH 12 GLOUCESTER 13

It would be stretching the bounds of reality ever so slightly to start proclaiming all things are rosy in the Cherry and White garden, but do not discount the value of this victory on the Kingsholm physique.

Now is not the time to hang out the bunting, throw street parties the length and breadth of this shire and target Sale in third place in the Premiership. And anyway, Dean Ryan is not one for parties.

But even he, the menacing big, bad wolf in the Gloucester dug-out, knows togetherness, work ethic and team spirit when he smells it and the scent wafted all round the away dressing room at the Madejski Stadium on Saturday night.

For the likes of Alex Page and Brad Davies – the half-back rookies plunged head-first into a Premiership maelstrom – this was a victory to die for. Both are in the kindergarten category of their senior careers but their sheer guts, composure and bloody-mindedness were something to behold on a scrappy night of hostilities that stretched the bounds of endurance to the limit.

When Page was not battling to clear out possession at the breakdown, he was racing back to field clearances, catch high balls and throw himself into tackles against the outsized Irish back row, while Davies did everything asked of him and more.

He kicked like a seasoned professional – both at goal and territorially – created the game's only try for Marcel Garvey and attempted to get the forward brigade ahead of him on the front foot.

In terms of brave performances, both players can take a huge amount of satisfaction from their contributions.

"We have talked a lot about work ethic and what it means to wear a Gloucester shirt over the last six weeks without actually showing it," said Ryan, not quite bearing all his teeth.

"But today we played like a Gloucester side with real spirit. Some of these guys have come into a real pressure environment and I can tell you they feel pretty special about themselves in the dressing room. I thought the work ethic was fantastic.

"I don't want to talk about top three, this and that. But we got a very important victory and for all of those players. that is the most important thing."

There were plenty of mistakes for sure – the line-out was a heated debate throughout, the contact area bitterly disputed and the scrums a real set-to, but Gloucester were magnificently well served by their skipper Adam Balding, the remarkable Andy Hazell in the breakaway position, Alex Brown and Adam Eustace. In fact, the entire forward arsenal worked themselves to a near standstill.

The bovver boys up front ensured the contest was red in both tooth and claw throughout, but Hazell's brilliance caused no end of Irish problems.

He was the stand-out contributor – menacing on the floor, tough in the tackle and always available for support – before he was carried off after being knocked out by Scott Staniforth's unintentional flying arm in the second half.

Staniforth is one of a number of neat footballers in the Irish side and, although they matched Gloucester's commitment and desire, they are drastically short on confidence – 23 tries in 18 games shows the pea-shooter potency of their attack.

They even butchered a simple two-on-one overlap that should have extended their 6-3 lead after 16 minutes, but Gloucester built on the reprieve and never looked back.

The only try came after 23 minutes and it was a horror for the hosts but a sparkling piece of finishing from Marcel Garvey. Kieron Dawson kicked clear from a line-out and Garvey ran back possession. Gloucester breathed life into the move from midfield using their heavy forwards and attacked the short side with purpose – as they did throughout.

When the ball came back, Terry Fanolua's neat inside flick found Davies and he sent Garvey scuttling to the line for a brilliant individual try worthy of winning any match.

London Irish's only points in the first half came from four Barry Everitt penalties, but there was never any real conviction from the home side that they could go on and win the game.

And when Everitt's kicking form deserted him after the interval, there was only ever likely to be one winner.

Gloucester looked a good deal more organised when they played through four or five phases, while the Irish based their game around disruption at the breakdown – a suffocating attempt to kill the game and earn penalties from which Everitt might win the contest.

But the decisive kick at goal fell to Gloucester with 50 minutes played. Davies made no mistake 30 metres out head-on to the sticks to hand the lead back to the visitors.

It was only by a point but Everitt hit the woodwork for the second time six minutes later, with an effort he should really have landed, and they hardly ever threatened again.

Gloucester's most worrying moment was the injury to Hazell that knocked him unconscious, but even with their most dynamic player out of commission, Balding and Co. simply dug in and grafted out the result.

Everitt could have won the game after 100 minutes on the pitch with a drop-goal but it would have been a travesty to Gloucester had it gone over.

Page, Davies and Co. deserved their moment of glory, but now they have to build on it against Leeds in a fortnight.

LONDON IRISH: D. Armitage; S. Staniforth, G. Appleford, M. Catt, J. Bishop (N. Mordt 35); B. Everitt, D. Edwards (P. Hodgson 55); N. Hatley, R. Russell (A. Flavin 74), R. Hardwick (D. Wheatley 49), R. Strudwick (capt.), B. Casey (N. Kennedy 78), P. Gustard (D. Danaher 55), K. Dawson, R. Reid.

GLOUCESTER: J. Goodridge; M. Garvey, N. Mauger, T. Fanolua, S. Kiole; B. Davies, A. Page; N. Wood (T. Sigley 47, N. Curnier 71), O. Azam, G. Powell, A. Eustace, A. Brown, J. Boer (J. Forrester 40), A. Hazell (P. Buxton 59), A. Balding (capt.).

REFEREE: A. Rowden (RFU)

ATTENDANCE: 17,111

STAR MAN: ANDY HAZELL.

EIGHT MINUTES: Barry Everitt penalty.
London Irish 3, Gloucester 0

11 MINUTES: Brad Davies penalty.
London Irish 3, Gloucester 3

14 MINUTES: Everitt penalty.
London Irish 6, Gloucester 3

23 MINUTES: Marcel Garvey try. Davies conversion.
London Irish 6, Gloucester 10

32 MINUTES: Everitt penalty.
London Irish 9, Gloucester 10

37 MINUTES: Everitt penalty.
London Irish 12, Gloucester 10

40 MINUTES: Davies penalty.
London Irish 12, Gloucester 13

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