

THE CITIZEN

MONDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2000

COLOMIERS DREAMS DASHED AS CHERRY AND WHITES
SALVAGE DRAW

LAST-DITCH TRY SAVES GLOUCESTER'S HOPES

GLOUCESTER 22, COLOMIERS 22

by Alastair Downey

This was a near death experience for Gloucester. A massive reminder of just how intense their Heineken Cup campaign will be.

Because here they were bombarded with its full force and played their 'get out of jail free' card to salvage a draw they frankly did not deserve.

John Brain gazed out across Kingsholm and muttered grimly: 'It would have been a disaster if we had lost.'

He was not wrong. Gloucester simply didn't function with any alacrity and with so much quality at their disposal, almost seemed to panic in the eye of Colomiers magnificent second half display.

Perhaps this will serve as a timely reminder.

Two European Cup victories and Gloucester were strolling – they will tread far more carefully this morning.

The French knew they had to win here. Defeat, and they were virtually out of the competition and they came within a whisker of inflicting Gloucester's third home reverse of the season.

Gloucester can point, quite rightly, to the fact they didn't lose and as the competition wears on that may prove to be a huge fillip.

They are, after all, the only unbeaten English team left in the competition – a fact they can feel rightly pleased about although they did themselves no justice here.

As time ebbed away they worked like dogs to pin Colomiers down and when referee Salera awarded them a penalty try deep into injury time, their face had been saved.

But Gloucester should have been awarded the score earlier.

Terry Fanolua bore down on the Colomiers line following a riveting break from Jason Little only to be taken in an horrendous cheese-wire tackle from Fabien Galthie that should have seen the French scrum-half dismissed.

That the Gloucester forwards enacted their own retribution was of little comfort, but it was the first time Colomiers were on the rack and after persistent infringement, Gloucester had their try.

However, their momentum was stopped comprehensively in the second period and instead of looking for gaps, they chose to blunder their way through a superbly marshalled defence in which Jean-Luc Sadourny was magnificent.

It was the manner of the performance that will cause brows to furrow deeply at Kingsholm. Gloucester simply did not perform but worse still, failed to take chances when they came their way – but there was enough there to convince that Gloucester can travel to France next weekend and win.

Twice in the first period they blew gaping overlaps and Jason Little's nervousness at filling Simon Mannix's boots at stand-off was all too painfully underlined.

Their best chance of the first period came when Ian Jones was driven on from a line-out, Chris Yates and Serge Simon made concerted breaks and Little's long pass found Chris Catling who was bundled into touch just short of the line.

Philippe Saint-Andre may also question his decision to play two openside flankers in Kingsley Jones and Andy Hazell.

Rather than the blistering speed Gloucester feared Colomiers may use, the French employed stability and a grinding forward power, particularly from the back of the scrum, that exposed Gloucester's tactical switch, despite Gloucester's two pocket warriors snapping with venom at every breakdown.

Crucially, when it mattered, Colomiers strung together phase after concerted phase of possession and when Gloucester did win the ball back there was no range in their clearance kicking and they handed possession away immediately.

Gloucester held a six point lead at the break thanks to four penalties from Elton Moncrieff, but the signs were that Colomiers were ready to pounce after dismantling Gloucester's game plan.

Four minutes into the second period they grabbed the try that blew the game wide open.

Almost inevitably it came from a malfunctioning Gloucester attack. Little, who ironically kicked away the ball against Roma only once, sliced a chip – the ball almost coming off his ankle and Yannick Jauzion picked up to feed Laurent Giolitti who raced away from Franck Schisano to score.

Now it was a duel between the boot of Moncrieff and Laurent Marticorena and it was the French who gained the upper hand with a drop goal and another penalty.

Moncrieff close the gap to one point with his fifth penalty but then Chris Catling was harshly sinbinned for knocking the ball into touch.

It was indicative of the referee that he should penalise Catling after stand-off Marticorena used the boot in a cowardly attack on Phil Vickery in the first half and was not even spoken to by the referee.

Gloucester could have quite easily caved in here – a man down and struggling to make any impact on the game. The fact they didn't concede a second try was a crumb of comfort for Saint-Andre.

They desperately needed a catalyst, something to ignite them into life, but the harder they tried, the more difficult it appeared for them to break through.

The thought of a home defeat finally got Gloucester moving and Little, slicing through midfield from centre, provided the inspiration.

It looked as if he would score himself, but then perhaps realising that Gloucester needed the conversion to tie the scores, he came infield.

Gloucester took play right and Fanolua stepped beautifully inside before Galthie's horrendous tackle.

They ran back and when Ian Jones was stopped by Sadourny for a third offence in quick succession, Gloucester had their penalty try. Byron Hayward converted and their blushes had been saved.

Gloucester will seek a dramatic improvement for the return but there is plenty to suggest scores will have to be settled.

GLOUCESTER : C. Catling, F. Schisano (B. Hayward 55), T. Fanolua, C. Yates, T. Beim, J. Little, E. Moncrieff (A. Gomarsall 76), S. Simon, O. Azam, P. Vickery, A. Eustace, I. Jones, A. Hazell, K. Jones (S. Ojomoh 51, E. Pearce 75), J. Paramore.

COLOMIERS : J-L. Sadourny (c), B. Lhande, M. Carre (Y. Jauzion 40), S. Roque, L. Giolitti, L. Morticorena, F. Galthie, W. Begarie, C. Laurent, J-F. Meslier de Rocan 9S[*sic*], Delpauch 49), S. Hopher (G. Moro 49), J-M. Lorenzi, V. Clement, H. Manent, S. Peysson (F. Ntamack 49).

REFEREE : M. Salera (Italy)

ATTENDANCE : 6,500

STAR MAN : A. Hazell (Gloucester)

JC