

THE CITIZEN

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2000

BRAVE GLOUCESTER SHOWN CUP DOOR
AFTER LLOYD'S TRY DOUBLE

REMORSELESS TIGERS GRAB TETLEY'S GLORY

GLOUCESTER 13 LEICESTER 25

A very tasty cup contest this. Maybe not the epic hoped for, but a chillingly brutal endorsement of club rugby.

This was an old fashioned cup thriller. There was no place for the faint-hearted – nowhere to hide. It was a meeting of muscularity between two domestic heavyweights, neither prepared to give an inch in an enthralling blood-soaked occasion.

Try telling these two the Tetley's Bitter Cup did not matter. In the end, however, the suffocating Leicester effort overcame that of determined Gloucester.

Leicester deserved to win. They have a way of manipulating control that is simply awesome and they are not afraid of a fight. The number of stitches coming out of their dressing room proved that, and in Martin Johnson they had the outstanding player on the field.

It was their defence that was so excellent. It was complete and total. They get people in there where it matters.

That is to take nothing away from Gloucester. This was a tremendous learning curve for the side that beat Bath. They simply demanded another go and matched Leicester blow for blow. And there were some very smart ones thrown in the first 20 minutes.

The combinations were well rehearsed and when a semblance of normality resumed, the ferocity of the tackling remained. One huge hit from Steve Ojomoh on Johnson summed up the desire. Had it been anyone but Johnson, they would have been blown into the middle of next week.

In the early stages, Gloucester had Leicester rattled. They got enough men in the road to cause panic. Men like Rob Fidler, Jake Boer and Ojomoh made searching, devilish impacts in and around the fringes.

Gloucester's early driving was immense. They were rewarded with a penalty try after 10 minutes after Leicester infringed for the third time following a battering line-out drive.

It was great stuff. This was Kingsholm on cup afternoon and Gloucester were loving it. It was nip and tuck because there was hardly any fluidity in a bruising game and tackles reigned in with such force, it was a credit to both sides that they got up and went for it again.

Leicester somehow needed a way back into the game. They got it with a good piece of fortune, but it is their work ethic that is so outstanding. To beat them, you not only have to conquer their defence and their excellent use of the referee, but you have to out-muscle them and out work them. It was their forwards who drove them back into contention, but they got back into the game with a lucky break.

Andy Goode's attempted drop-goal spun off his boot and forced Chris Catling into a hurried clearance. Gloucester, perhaps, could have done with it going over, because in the end it cost them seven points. Leicester drove two attacks infield before Goode arrowed a cross-field kick towards Leon Lloyd who out-foxed Rob Jewell and scored in the corner.

From then on, Leicester were back in the game. Nothing can be taken away from Gloucester though. They battled and Byron Hayward clipped them back in front with a penalty as Gloucester worked with passion and power to lead at half-time.

Leicester, however, were back on terms just five minutes after the re-start with a Stimpson penalty and this acted as a real spur. Gloucester were now faced with a critical period because the ball coming back on the Tigers side was of far greater quality.

However, chances went astray. Gloucester's tackling was relentless and Pat Howard knocked on close to the line before Lloyd, coming hard on the blind-side, was unable to link with the impressive Paul Gustard inside him.

Stimpson was then stopped in his tracks with a Fanolua special in midfield, but Leicester were sensing there might be a way through.

Eventually, there was. With Joe Ewens receiving treatment in midfield, Leicester spun play to the right where Oliver Smith slipped through the gap and bounded 40 metres to pass Catling into the corner for the game-splitting try.

But Gloucester stirred themselves for a rousing conclusion they can take a great deal of credit from. At last the Kingsholm roar stirred itself as Gloucester took the game by the neck and drove hard at Leicester, but when crucial composure was needed, Gloucester simply could not find it.

The introduction of Chris Yates gave them a platform in midfield though and it was his break that galvanised Gloucester for their final onslaught. Fanolua linked with some brilliant handling and Gloucester thundered on – Ewens thumping into Stimpson as Gloucester won back possession.

It was here though, they floundered. They tried to match Leicester at their own game – driving hard and true in search of the try.

They still had time on their hands and could have kicked at goal to leave them just two points adrift. You got the sense that Leicester were just lapping it up.

But the drama was just beginning. Andy Gomarsall aimed a high kick towards the corner and Catling hurtled in but was adjudged to have knocked on over the line in search of the try.

Gloucester's frustration had reached boiling point and when play fragmented in midfield, it was Johnson who had his hand on the ball. Lloyd's late, soul-destroying try, was hard on Gloucester but delighted the Tigers.

GLOUCESTER : C. Catling, R. Jewell (C. Yates 56), J. Ewens, T. Fanolua, T. Beim, B. Hayward, A. Gomarsall, P. Vickery, C. Fortey (J. Djoudi 73), A. Deacon (S. Sanchez 73), R. Fidler (E. Pearce 55), M. Cornwell, J. Boer (J. Paramore 68), A. Hazell, S. Ojomoh.

LEICESTER : T. Stimpson, A. Healey, O. Smith (G. Gelderbloom 79), P. Howard, L. Lloyd, A. Goode, J. Hamilton, G. Rowntree, D. West (R. Cockerill 34), D. Garforth, M. Johnson, B. Kay, P. Gustard, L. Moody, W. Johnson (A. Balding 54).

REFEREE : B. Campsall (Yorkshire)

ATTENDANCE : 5,600

STAR MAN : Rob Fidler (Gloucester)

JC