

THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2000

IRISH BEATEN BY A FIRST-HALF CHARGE

GLOUCESTER 26 LONDON IRISH 6

Gloucester collected four more vital Premiership points after blowing London Irish apart at Kingsholm with a devastating forward dominated first period.

They swarmed into Irish with venom and scored two tries through their skipper Kingsley Jones and Tom Beim to engineer a clear opening.

Gloucester stuttered a little in the second half, but their victory was never in danger after the Cherry and Whites seriously disrupted the Irish in the set piece.

Philippe Saint-Andre knows it is time to kick on. Victory over Saracens last week had to be built on.

London Irish had won their last seven before their visit to Kingsholm and they were greeted with a monsoon. Welcome to Castle Grim.

Gloucester welcomed back Trevor Woodman after six months on the sidelines and it was through the Gloucester powerhouse, they got going.

They made a bruising, supercharged start through the energetic workings of their forwards.

Olivier Azam, back from international duty, gave the Irish an early taste [in] the first period with a street-fighter burst.

Gloucester remained on the attack. Ian Jones tapped a line-out down to Woodman, Kingsley Jones burst on, but they could not make the most of the opportunity as Elton Moncrieff, Jason Little and Jake Boer all probed for openings.

The Irish were seriously struggling and defensively from two scrums, Gloucester turned the screw and were awarded a penalty for collapsing and Simon Mannix put Gloucester ahead.

Gloucester's driving was aggressive, straight and true in a bruising beginning and the Irish were not helped [by] some very poor set piece play.

From their third lost line-out, deep in their own half, Kingsley Jones collected the ball at the tail and burrowed his way over for the score.

It was all Gloucester. Their kicking was excellent, using the skiddy conditions perfectly, hemming the Irish back and preying on their vulnerability to the set play.

What was so astonishing was that Gloucester hardly had any of their own ball to play with. But they pressurised the Irish in the scrum, before Jarrod Cunningham got them on the board with a penalty.

It was crucial Gloucester responded. They did with two Mannix penalties and in the sodden conditions, men like Kingsley Jones, Woodman and Andy Deacon revelled on the floor.

The Irish were desperate to keep the ball in play, but it cost them dear after 36 minutes. They spilled it on their right and Tom Beim picked up and raced away for the customary score.

The work of Gloucester was emphasised at the break when Kingsley Jones trooped off caked in mud after a highly satisfactory half.

Half-time: Gloucester 23, London Irish 3

Gloucester had again set a solid first period base. It was now crucial they kept up their momentum because in the last two weeks, they have floundered in the second half.

They began the second period like they ended the first. On top and in control.

The Irish were penned inside their own half as Gloucester controlled the early play. Ian Jones tapped down to the tail of the line-out and they drove on in the hope of an early score. They were held but Chris Yates burst through but could not power home.

It was crucial Gloucester made the most of their pressure, but they lacked the composure or delivery to cement their advantage with a third try.

However, for the first time in a fortnight, Mannix landed Gloucester's first points in the second half with a penalty. There had been no way out for the Irish, but as the half progressed they came back into the game.

However, it was tetchy, and a lot of ill feeling crept into the game, mainly because Gloucester had been penalised off the ball constantly. But all the Irish were limited to was a penalty from Cunningham to take the score to 26-6.

The referee was infuriating Gloucester more and more, but they were always in control and Beim almost grabbed his second try when he breezed away from the cover, but looked inside for support instead of going for the corner.

Beim was denied a try when he intercepted and hacked through to score, but the referee penalised him for a knock on, despite the fact the ball did not touch the floor.

Unfortunately the win was marred by a serious leg injury to Irish star Conor O'Shea who was carried off in the last minute.

GLOUCESTER: C. Catling; J. Ewens, J. Little, C. Yates, T. Beim; S. Mannix, E. Moncrieff; T. Woodman, O. Azam, A. Deacon, R. Fidler, I. Jones, J. Boer, K. Jones (capt.), J. Paramore.

Reps.: A. Gomarsall, B. Hayward, F. Schisano, H. Gregoire-Mazzocco, J. Djoudi, S. Sanchez, E. Pearce.

LONDON IRISH: C. O'Shea (capt.); N. Ezulike, T. Matson, J. Wright, J. Bishop; J. Cunningham, O. Junior-Tonu'u; N. Hatley, D. Alexopoulous, R. Hardwick, G. Delaney, S. Williams, E. Halvey, C. Allan, R. Bates.

Reps.: K. Campbell, R. Ashforth, A. Flavin, S. Halford, M. Worsley, D. Danaher, C. Sheasby.

REFEREE: G. Aston-Jones (RFU).

STAR MAN: Kingsley Jones.

JC