

THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2000

HEARTBREAK FOR THE CHERRY AND WHITES AT WELFORD ROAD

GLOUCESTER SUFFER INJURY-TIME AGONY

LEICESTER 31 GLOUCESTER 28

An injury-time try from Fereti Tuilagi broke Gloucester's hearts as Leicester snatched an astonishing win.

Tuilagi was on hand to plunge over in the far corner and shatter the Cherry and Whites after a splendid backs to the wall second half display.

Gloucester's players were numb, heart broken and shocked after whipping into a first half lead with scores from Andy Deacon, Chris Yates and Junior Paramore, but in the second half and in the last 10 minutes with 14 men, Leicester's superiority told.

Despite being violently shaken, Leicester's amazing home record remains intact.

Hopes rode high. Perhaps this would be the afternoon Gloucester cemented their Zurich Premiership credentials. They could not have faced a bigger test.

Leicester, unbeaten at home for three seasons, are the ultimate test for the Cherry and Whites.

Philippe Saint-Andre had kept his final team selection close to his chest and there was good reason. Gloucester were shorn of crucial members of the side.

Rory Greenslade-Jones came in for the prolific Tom Beim, who was ruled out with a quad problem, while at stand-off Byron Hayward replaced Simon Mannix, who it was claimed was struck down with a calf problem.

The improving Jake Boer has flu, and Steve Ojomoh came into the back row, where Andy Hazell replaced skipper Kingsley-Jones.

Gloucester knew their game plan. It was up to them to stick to it, but Leicester were in front as early as the second minute.

Byron Hayward's chip kick was taken by Tim Stimpson and he aimed high before running into Rob Fidler who was penalised for blocking. Stimpson made no mistake with the kick.

But the momentum Gloucester have poured into their game in the last weeks has established some crucial belief. They have shaken off their early season lethargy and knew their meeting with the English heavyweights was vital.

However, they were shaky here. Stimpson collected his second penalty before Gloucester cranked up the gears.

Olivier Azam found Ian Jones and Gloucester rumbled on with Hazell and Hayward stroked his first penalty.

The fire had been ignited and Gloucester almost conjured a sensational try from deep. Paramore collected a kick and found Chris Catling and he made ground before releasing Rory Greenslade-Jones, who cut inside Geordan Murphy instead of going for the corner, and the momentum had been lost.

But Gloucester had the established edge. They refused to take a backward step in attack or defence and after 18 minutes collected their first try.

It was laid in the disruption caused by Jones and Hazell in the line-out, and after a surging break by Yates, Gloucester won a scrum. Yates was involved again to the right and captain for the day Andy Deacon completed the move with Hayward converting.

It was a terrific game, but all the Gloucester forwards, particularly Paramore, were outstanding and four minutes later, they were in again.

Gloucester's scrum was held, but Andy Gomarsall nipped play away to the left. They got slightly bogged down, but Gomarsall gave a lovely little feed to Yates and he took Murphy and Stimpson over the line. Hayward converted and Gloucester had blown open a 17-6 lead.

Not even two penalties could dampen the spirit, and Gloucester, sticking so superbly to their game plan, and hard edged approach, grabbed their third try of the half.

Paramore, running right, linked with Fanolua, who took out two men and Paramore received the ball back and plundered over for [the] try to complete Gloucester's best half of work this season.

Half-time: Leicester 12, Gloucester 22

This game was far from dead and after such an explosive first period, Gloucester were always going to struggle to retain the tempo.

They were hit immediately after the re-start with an injury to Hazell that forced the Gloucester dynamo off.

Stimpson landed an early penalty to kick start an astonishing Leicester recovery.

If ever there was a test to Gloucester, this was it. It was hugely physical, but the mistakes they had not made in the first period began creeping into their play.

A Catling clearance kick was charged down and Leicester bounded forward, but Azam robbed Garforth to stem the danger, but Gloucester were needing everything just to stay afloat.

That is not to say Gloucester did not have their chances to establish some control. They lost a great position when Gomarsall opted for the wrong call down the blindside, Leicester regained possession and Stimpson punished the Cherry and Whites to take the score to 25-18.

Like Leicester, Gloucester are playing right on the edge of the laws, but they have real trouble in putting teams away. That is to take nothing away from the Tigers who were simply awesome in the second period and tested every inch of Gloucester's will. Two more penalties for Stimpson, plus one for Hayward brought the score to 28-24 and Leicester needed a try with time running out.

However, for all their possession, and Gloucester were simply strangled inside their own half, Leicester could not prise open for the try.

Some of the Gloucester tackling was breathtaking, as well as brutally hard as they repelled Leicester. But Leicester were still able to snatch an astounding win as Tuilagi was on hand to plunge over in the far corner and shatter the Cherry and Whites after a splendid backs to the wall second half display.

LEICESTER: T. Stimpson; G. Murphy, L. Lloyd, P. Howard, F. Tuilagi; A. Goode, J. Hamilton; G. Rowntree, R. Cockerill (capt.), D. Garforth, L. Deacon, B. Kay, P. Gustard, L. Moody, W. Johnson.
Reps.: J. Grindall, G. Gelderbloom, A. Balding, B. Lewitt, R. Nebbett, D. West, P. Freshwater.

GLOUCESTER: C. Catling; T. Fanolua, J. Little, C. Yates, R. Greenslade-Jones; B. Hayward, A. Gomarsall; T. Woodman, O. Azam, A. Deacon (capt.), R. Fidler, I. Jones, S. Ojomoh, A. Hazell, J. Paramore.
Reps.: I. Sanders, J. Simpson-Daniel, S. Sanchez, M. Cornwell, C. Fortey, H. Gregoire-Mazzocco, E. Pearce.

REFEREE: B. Campbell (Yorkshire)

STAR MAN: Junior Paramore

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