

THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2000

GLOUCESTER LOSE A BRUISING ENCOUNTER

CHERRY AND WHITES FAIL TO CONVERT THEIR PRESSURE
INTO POINTS

NORTHAMPTON 34 GLOUCESTER 15

Gloucester were left bloodied and well beaten as Northampton won an immensely physical battle by three tries to nil at Franklin's Gardens.

Philippe Saint-Andre's team dominated up front. But tries from Ben Cohen, Matt Allen and Harvey Thorneycroft made it a miserable afternoon [for] the Cherry and Whites, who could not make all their hard work pay. It was a bruising game with both Rob Fidler and Chris Fortey departing with cuts.

Gloucester had a fine start. From the kick-off, Ben Cohen fielded play and looked inside for Joe Shaw, but his pass was terrible and Gloucester bounded through.

It set their early tempo for the first 15 minutes. Gloucester exploded into contact and drove at the heart of Northampton's defence and looked menacing and hard edged in the scrummage.

But it was from their first line-out that caused Northampton most danger. Ian Jones collected the throw and Gloucester drove infield before Rory Greenslade-Jones burrowed away down the blindside, although they were penalised for not releasing the ball.

Gloucester's dominance got them on the board after eight minutes when Ian Jones and the rest of the pack allowed Elton Moncrieff to drop a goal.

The Saints drove back with phase after concerted phase of possession, but it was lateral and Gloucester defended well to keep them out until they were penalised for off-side and Matt Dawson slotted an easy penalty. It was about as raw and brutal as you could[*sic*]. Phil Vickery and Budge Pountney had a set to, before Dawson slotted his second penalty for off-side to give the hosts the lead for the first time.

Gloucester refused to buckle, but for all their work up front, Gloucester could not finish all their good work. Olivier Azam was at the heart of a powerful drive but Jason Little was thundered into by Harvey Thorneycroft and Saints drove forward.

Gloucester never escaped from these problems and conceded a try after 23 minutes. It was still all too sideways until they got near the Gloucester line and Dawson opted to tap a quick penalty to went left[*sic*]. Tim Rodber was on hand to give an overhead pass to Matt Allen who just made the line for the score. It was exactly what Gloucester did not need. It gave the hosts the edge, before the contest erupted in a hail of fists in an explosive situation.

It was not what was needed, but the battle was inflamed by Dawson. Junior Paramore was sinbinned for two late, arm swinging tackles, but Dawson opted to tap quickly and ran straight into the cover to be taken ferociously out of the play. Northampton kept the pressure on until it bubbled over with menace again, Azam and Steve Brotherstone swapping blows in a real trench battle.

Gloucester were not going to back away from the confrontation, but even with seven men, held the Saints scrum on their line. However, a man short was always going to spell danger and just before the break Dawson collected his third penalty with a monster to stretch Northampton to 13-6 ahead. Gloucester had already lost Rob Fidler at this point with a blood injury to be replaced by Adam Eustace as boots strayed at the ruck again.

Half-time :
Northampton 13, Gloucester 6.

What was crucial now was that Gloucester clawed themselves back into the game, They got a good start when Mannix kicked a penalty, but Dawson responded to take Northampton to 16-9 ahead.

It was nip and tuck now and you needed eyes everywhere to notice every incident that made playing the game almost impossible. But when Gloucester needed a cool head, Mannix provided it with a penalty.

The next score would prove crucial and it was the Saints who grabbed it when Fidler infringed at a line-out and Dawson kicked Northampton 19-12 ahead.

Gloucester's hopes suffered still further when Jason Little limped off to be replaced by James Simpson-Daniel, and Andy Gomarsall came on for Moncrieff.

Gloucester had enough of the ball but were unable to make the most of it. They had dominated the scrum all afternoon and opted to take one underneath the Saints posts, but Brotherstone wheeled and Gloucester lost the ball.

Gloucester still had time to take the kick, but soon found themselves 10 points behind. They were unlucky to be penalised when Kingsley Jones came from well behind the back foot on Dawson and then Gloucester suffered again, only for Saints to get off the floor with no Gloucester near them[*sic*] and Dawson made it 22-12.

Mannix kept Gloucester in the hunt with his fourth penalty, but they were immediately on the back foot again. Northampton had the bit between their teeth now and Gloucester looked like they had conceded a try and the ball was recycled to Cohen on the left, but he dropped the ball over the line.

Strangely, Northampton were given the line-out but Gloucester stole possession, although Hayward's kick did not find touch and from there, Gloucester were hemmed back again.

Brouzet and Co. drove Gloucester deep inside their own half and when defenders had been sucked in, Joe Shaw raced into the line and put Cohen away, and this time he scored. Dawson landed a superb conversion and Gloucester were now 29-15 behind with six minutes remaining.

Yates was replaced by Adam Eustace, but there was no stopping Northampton now and they roared back at Gloucester, whose chronic ill discipline reared its ugly head as the Saints controlled the ball with a series of penalties.

Dawson's quick tap allowed Thorneycroft to plough over from close to complete a miserable day for Gloucester.

NORTHAMPTON: J. Shaw; H. Thorneycroft, L. Martin, M. Allen, B. Cohen; A. Hopher, M. Dawson; G. Pagel, S. Brotherstone, M. Stewart, D. Brouzet, T. Rodber, A. Blowers, B. Pountney, P. Lam (capt.).

Reps.: S. Thompson, K. Todd, J. Phillips, G. Seely, D. Malone, M. Tucker, C. Hyndman.

GLOUCESTER: B. Hayward; C. Catling, J. Little, C. Yates, R. Greenslade-Jones; S. Mannix, E. Moncrieff; T. Woodman, O. Azam, P. Vickery, R. Fidler, I. Jones, S. Ojomoh, K. Jones (capt.), J. Paramore. Reps.: A. Gomarsall, J. Simpson-Daniell, M. Cornwell, A. Eustace, A. Deacon, C. Fortey, J. Boer.

REFEREE: S. Leyshon (Bristol)

STAR MAN: Trevor Woodman