

# THE CITIZEN

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2000

DISASTER AS SAINTS WIN AT KINGSHOLM

GLOUCESTER THROW AWAY POINTS THEY SHOULD  
HAVE SECURED

GLOUCESTER 12 NORTHAMPTON 15

A Kingsholm disaster and yet more Premiership points have disappeared from Gloucester's palm when they should have grabbed them.

Philippe Saint-Andre ruefully kicked an empty chip packet along the touchline at the final whistle, it was a surprise he did not miss it because his team are certainly not performing as he would like and hope.

As the chill air hung still, Kingsholm was morose. An air of inevitability had taken an icy grip on the cast of nearly 10,000 way before the finish and the final whistle almost acted as a release. It was Bath all over again.

Skipper Kingsley Jones sat with his head bowed, distraught, whilst the rest of his team sunk to the turf in despair.

This truly was a nightmare and there may be some fall out at Kingsholm this week. The worst thing for Gloucester was that they had done enough to win two games.

But there is just something not right. Gloucester won two tries to nil, yet it was indicative of their season that they were still unable to nail shut the win so much of their play deserved.

Last season they were watertight, utterly dependable and did everything with such a solid conviction because it was simple, but although Gloucester dominated possession and territory, they were just not sleek enough to make it count.

If Simon Mannix had strung together a game similar to the one that dismantled Newcastle on Saturday, Gloucester would have been away and out of sight by the break. You simply have to nail your kicks in the Premiership. Defences are so tight and Northampton are such a well organised side, it is crucial.

Mannix also struggled with distribution, chiefly because he was forced to mop up from Andy Gomarsall at number nine, and it was here Gloucester floundered.

Mannix missed three penalties, two he would usually take with his eyes shut, and while it took the hosts until the 40th minute to score, Northampton had already smash-and-grabbed their way ahead with four Paul Grayson penalties from their four sorties into the Gloucester half.

Every time they entered Gloucester's half they came away with something.

They took their chances, minimised their mistakes and waited for Gloucester to make theirs. From their point of view it was almost the perfect away display.

Gloucester are developing a worrying habit of losing games they should win. They may be excused at Leicester because of their domestic dominance, but Gloucester attempted to play all the rugby here and will look at the Zurich Premiership this morning and see Northampton in second place and themselves in mid-table.

Their first chance was wasted after a blistering start on the quarter-hour. They moved play to the left and Terry Fanolua, an outstanding dynamo in midfield, cut away and linked with the supporting Tom Beim, who somehow dropped the ball with the line at his mercy.

Soon after they found themselves 6-0 down after Grayson had punished them for their indiscipline and it was then 9-0. Northampton were driving home their advantage as Gloucester spluttered away.

Gloucester were again forthright in the scrummage and were engaged in a bitter battle in the loose, where, for the Saints, hooker Steve Thompson was outstanding.

However, Gloucester's execution was just not clean. They mis-controlled the ball at crucial times on the floor, but crucially seized the initiative just before the break.

Jason Little and Beim swung play deep to the left, before play spread to the right and Olivier Azam's long pass found Fanolua who dived home to breath life to the effort.

Single-handed he had brought Gloucester within touching distance and converted his own try to allow Gloucester to go down the tunnel in far better shape.

When Gloucester get it right they play some fantastic stuff and they nearly grabbed their second try soon after the re-start.

Rob Fidler, who battled manfully despite an early knock, palmed down to Jake Boer who bundled down the blind-side, and although Gloucester arrived in numbers, they could not force the try.

However, their early second half storm had to tell and after 52 minutes it did. Gomarsall linked with Mannix after a quick tap-penalty and when Fanolua was involved to the right of the posts, Mannix took his chance to dive over and tie the scores.

Kingsholm erupted but the worrying thing for Saint-Andre's men is that it took them so long to get on terms.

Fanolua missed the conversion, following a penalty, but there was enough belief and fire to suggest Gloucester could grab the match by the throat and take it to the Saints.

But vitally, Northampton continued to execute play with greater precision and when Trevor Woodman was penalised for pulling down a maul, Grayson collected his fifth successive penalty.

They had not sniffed the try-line, but still found themselves ahead.

Despite a searing break from Joe Ewens, who had an excellent game after good work from Mannix and Fanolua, it was Northampton who grew stronger as the match entered its final stages.

Gloucester were awarded a series of late penalties, but there was no calmness to their play and it was the Saints who were victorious for the second successive season at Kingsholm.

GLOUCESTER: C. Catling (B. Hayward 69); J. Ewens, T. Fanolua, J. Little, T. Beim; S. Mannix, A. Gomarsall; T. Woodman, O. Azam (C. Fortey 66), A. Deacon (S. Sanchez 71), R. Fidler, I. Jones, J. Boer, K. Jones. S. Ojomoh (J. Paramore 66).

NORTHAMPTON: P. Grayson; L. Martin, A. Bateman, J. Leslie, J. Shaw, A. Hopher, M. Dawson, G. Pagel, S. Thompson, M. Stewart, O. Brouzet, T. Rodber, A. Blowers, B. Pountney, G. Seely.

REFEREE: R. Goodlife (RFU)

ATTENDANCE: 9,859

STAR MAN: Terry Fanolua (Gloucester)