

THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, JANUARY 6, 2001

EUROPEAN DREAMS FINISHED AT BRISTOL

GLOUCESTER SLIP UP AGAIN AS CONTEPOMI KICKS
SIX PENALTIES

BRISTOL 18 GLOUCESTER 9

Felipe Contepomi struck yet more nails into Gloucester's withering Heineken Cup bid to condemn them to a nightmare defeat at Bristol.

Contepomi landed six penalties to turn a half-time deficit into a convincing victory and leave Gloucester with a desperate fight on their hands to salvage a European place for next season.

Gloucester's points came from three Simon Mannix penalties, but they were woefully short of what Philippe Saint-Andre expects and never threatened the Bristol[*sic*] when the heat was turned up.

With three defeats in their last four Premiership outings, Philippe Saint-Andre's faltering Gloucester caravan arrived at the Memorial Ground with just one option, Saint-Andre knew they had to win.

His mid-week statement was that he was feeling the pressure and that his next three games were crucial.

He again made changes. Andy Deacon took over from Kingsley Jones as captain and that allowed Andy Hazell to start on the openside. Chris Yates replaced the injured Jason Little in the centre, while Chris Fortey came in for Olivier Azam.

It was Fortey who made the first mistake – spilling the kick off and giving Bristol a firm attacking option.

Gloucester were penalised for off-side and Felipe Contepomi gave Bristol the lead after just two minutes.

However, Gloucester were soon on the attack. David Rees dropped a high ball and Gloucester used the scrum to attack to the right.

When play switched to the left, Andy Gomarsall found Chris Catling and Yates as Gloucester probed down the nearside, but although Jake Boer made ground, Catling spilled the ball. But Gloucester levelled when Simon Mannix kicked a penalty.

The Cherry and Whites held sway territorially, but their approach play was scratchy. There was hardly any fluency in their game and Bristol made them pay when Contepomi kicked his second penalty.

There was plenty of West Country grit and bite, but Gloucester's concentration seemed to waver during attack and although there was plenty of good work up front, much of the ball was wasted.

But Gloucester refused to buckle. Catling exposed Rees' kick and Gloucester attacked to win a penalty, which Mannix slid just wide of the right post.

Minutes later, though, they were on terms. Fanolua kicked towards Best, who fumbled, and Mannix equalised with his second penalty.

There was everything to play for. Gloucester had a great deal of possession, but behind the scrum, they could hardly string a pass together.

Junior Paramore, once again, was the hub of their forward work with stinging drives and big hits, but there was precious little quality behind the forwards, and if anything, Bristol, with Pichot showing, looked sharper.

Bristol strung together their best period of the half, but seemed content to kick away possession, and once Gloucester weathered it, they came back.

With time in the half running out, Gloucester moved play to the left and Mannix threaded a kick behind the Bristol cover and Beim caught Best to win Gloucester a scrum.

They drove forward, Hazell broke the first tackle and off-loaded to Paramore, but he spilled the ball with the line at his mercy.

The platform had been laid and Gloucester, from another inviting scrum, again failed to make it count. Mannix missed all his runners with a horrible pass and Catling was forced to scamper back and recover.

Both teams visibly lacked confidence, but Gloucester showed how dangerous they could be with a series of well worked line-out drives and right on the interval, Mannix landed his third penalty.

Half-time:
Bristol 6, Gloucester 9

Gloucester's half-time lead was immediately under threat from Bristol and in a blistering opening, the Cherry and Whites found themselves a score behind.

Gomarsall dived over the top at a ruck and Contepomi easily slotted over. The hosts' driving was quick and clean and for the first time, Gloucester were under some concerted pressure.

Bristol took the lead when the number 10 landed his fifth penalty and minutes his sixth[*sic*] when Gloucester were again caught off-side. From a 9-6 deficit, Bristol were now 15-9 ahead and scenting blood.

Gloucester responded by replacing Fortey with Azam and the amazing thing was, it took him 90 seconds before he decided to have a fight with everyone.

Gloucester were given a life-line with a penalty in front of the posts, but Mannix's kicking gremlins returned and he sliced his kick across the face of the posts.

Time was slowly ebbing away for Gloucester. Defeat was almost unthinkable at Kingsholm, but they were simply having no joy against a fired up Bristol eight who were getting better and better as the half went on.

Yates and the rest of his midfield simply had no room to work in and, apart from the odd break by Fanolua, Gloucester's play was too mistake-ridden to make an impact.

The hosts came closest to the first try of the match when after a splendid break from a line-out, Spencer Brown beat Ewens and was hauled down just short.

Gloucester were then forced to repel wave after wave of home assaults, orchestrated by Pichot, but the hosts were rewarded when Contepomi landed his sixth penalty for a nine point lead.

It was do or die stuff. Catling chased Gomarsall's kick and Gloucester won a line-out deep. However, Azam was caught fighting with Garath Archer and was sin-binned.

Bristol were virtually first to everything and Gloucester subsided with 14 men as their play became desperate. The home crowd roared on and fittingly it was the hosts who ended beneath the Gloucester posts to wreck Gloucester's European Cup chances for next season.

BRISTOL: L. Best; D. Rees, L. Nabaro, J. Mayer, S. Brown; F. Contepomi, A. Pichot (capt.); L. Gerrard, N. McCarthy, D. Crompton, G. Archer, A. Brown, S. Fenn, C. Short, M. Salter.

Reps.: B. Williams, K. Fullman, A. Sheridan, J. Brownrigg, G. Baber, E. Simone, G. Bowen.

GLOUCESTER: C. Catling; J. Ewens, T. Fanolua, C. Yates, T. Beim;
S. Mannix, A. Gomarsall; T. Woodman, C. Fortey, A. Deacon (capt.),
R. Fidler, I. Jones, J. Boer, A. Hazell, J. Paramore.
Reps.: E. Moncrieff, B. Hayward, R. Greenslade-Jones, S. Sanchez,
O. Azam, M. Cornwell, S. Ojomoh.

REFEREE: A. Rowden (Berkshire)

STAR MAN: Junior Paramore

JC