

THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, JANUARY 13, 2001

MONCRIEFF KEEPS CUP DREAMS ALIVE

GLOUCESTER SURVIVE AFTER AN INCREDIBLE
LAST-GASP DROP-GOAL

GLOUCESTER 28 LLANELLI 27

Elton Moncrieff wrote himself into Kingsholm folklore with a 77th minute drop-goal to rescue Gloucester from a Heineken Cup abyss against Llanelli.

Moncrieff's kick was deflected over the bar by Llanelli flanker Dafydd Rees-Jones to rescue Gloucester and give them a one point win to breathe life into their European challenge after the Scarlets looked destined to ransack Kingsholm after an outstanding display.

With captain Scott Quinnell outstanding, Llanelli scored a try in each half from Mark Jones to look almost certain to book their place in the finals before Moncrieff's late-late salvage operation.

The visitors made the better start. Llanelli used short, sharp drives through prop Martyn Madden as they drove Gloucester back and took the lead after three minutes.

Gloucester were penalised for off-side and Stephen Jones neatly tucked over the kick.

That shook Gloucester into life and they battered their way to force their own penalty. But the kicking gremlins that have affected Simon Mannix showed again and he chipped wide of the posts.

That was the signal for Scarlets to probe again and Catling was forced to bundle the ball into touch after Scott Quinnell had picked up and chased ahead.

It proved crucial because it woke Gloucester from their slumber and a series of ferocious drives from Olivier Azam and Chris Yates got Gloucester moving.

Gloucester camped on the Llanelli line and battered their way to four line-outs. However, they could not control the ball efficiently enough, despite a cracking drive that almost brought a try for Kingsley Jones. Llanelli's defence was outstanding and Gloucester could not find a way through.

It was to prove decisive. Gloucester had secured the majority of the possession, but, just like the match against Northampton, could not make it count.

Llanelli regrouped and Jones kicked them further in front with a penalty and then rocked Kingsholm with the games opening score.

Madden made a barging break through the middle to split Gloucester open, Moon fed Jones and when play came to the right, Dafydd James was caught by Kingsley Jones who got his pass away to Mark Jones who went behind the posts. Jones converted and Gloucester were 13 points down.

It was a real choker because with minimal possession, Llanelli were now well established. Gloucester had struggled to achieve any kind of platform and desperately needed the score, but they finally got on the score sheet to set up a quite breathtaking finale to the half.

Yates was heavily involved as Gloucester drove play to the left and forced a line-out. Gloucester held possession and drove infield where Llanelli pulled down the maul and Mene awarded a penalty try. Mannix converted and Kingsholm erupted.

They were on their feet immediately following a stirring passage of play ignited by Elton Moncrieff. He offloaded to Jake Boer as Gloucester rampaged through midfield to set up a superb position, but were denied the chance when Dafydd Rees-Jones was sin-binned for killing the ball. Kingsholm was in ferment and Mannix kicked the penalty.

Half-time:
Gloucester 10, Llanelli 13

The first score after the break would be crucial and it was Llanelli who got it when Jones added a penalty to stretch the Scarlets' lead to six points.

Mannix responded with a monster from almost the halfway line before Gloucester's chances suffered a monumental blow when they were hit with a second Llanelli try.

Mannix aimed high but full-back Garan Evans fielded possession and set up a terrific counter thrust. Dafydd James made a great break and Mark Jones beat off Fanolua and raced in to split the game wide open.

Gloucester's chances were slowly ebbing. The ball was slow to come away from the maul situation and their kicking out of hand was not accurate enough.

However, with Rob Fidler having a huge game in the loose there was still fire in their hopes.

Mannix kept Gloucester in it with his fourth penalty with 15 minutes remaining, before one of the most astonishing climaxes Kingsholm has ever seen.

Llanelli had proved dangerous on the counter-attack and just waited for Gloucester to make a mistake. They did again to allow Jones to boot the Scarlets 24-16 ahead with time slowly draining away.

However, in a barnstorming finish Gloucester raised themselves and with the freshly introduced Andy Hazell pegged Llanelli back. Mannix hit two more accurate penalties to match one from Jones and set up an unbelievable final few minutes.

Gloucester drove play deep into the Llanelli half and they seemed to be running out of attacking options until Moncrieff picked up possession and aimed to drop a goal. His kick was not accurate enough but in an attempt to charge down the effort Llanelli number seven Dafydd Rees-Jones deflected the ball over the bar and Gloucester, astonishingly, were in the lead for the first time.

Kingsholm literally blew its roof off, but there was still time for one last desperate Llanelli assault. From the kick-off they aimed deep into Gloucester territory but Beim was there to halt their advance before Jones attempted a drop goal that flicked off the outside of his boot to signal the end of a quite amazing Heineken Cup tie.

GLOUCESTER: C. Catling; T. Fanolua, J. Little, C. Yates, T. Beim; S. Mannix, E. Moncrieff; T. Woodman, O. Azam, P. Vickery, R. Fidler, I. Jones, J. Boer, K. Jones, S. Ojomoh.

Reps.: A. Gomarsall, B. Hayward, R. Greenslade-Jones C. Fortey, A. Hazell, A. Eustace, A. Deacon.

LLANELLI: G. Evans; M. Jones, D. James, S. Finau, W. Proctor; S. Jones, R. Moon; P. Booth, R. McBryde, M. Maddyn, V. Cooper, C. Gillies, C. Wyatt, D. Rees-Jones, S. Quinnell (c).

Reps.: J. Davies, M. Thomas, E. Katalau, M. Buckingham, D. Peel, A. Lawson, M. Cardey.

REFEREE: D. Mene (France)

STAR MAN: Rob Fidler