

# THE CITIZEN

MONDAY, JANUARY 22, 2001

GLOUCESTER QUALIFY BUT ONLY AFTER A FEW SCARES

ROMA 29 GLOUCESTER 38

A patch of dense fog shrouded Kingsholm last night, and Gloucester were forced to emerge from their own pea-souper to reach the quarter-finals of the Heineken Cup with a match against Cardiff.

Mission was accomplished in the Eternal City, and in doing so they penned the first lines in a new chapter for this famous old club. Gloucester may yet be eternally grateful for their Italian job.

A quarter-final spot and a home draw, nothing more can be asked. It is some achievement for a team making their debut in the top tier of European club rugby. Anything is now possible.

Gloucester may not be playing the rugby they might like, but they are still, just about, able to keep their destiny in their own hands.

It is worth remembering that when Philippe Saint-Andre took over as coach, his team scored a hat-full of tries against West Hartlepool, but were beaten and then also lost away at Bedford in his first few nerve-jangling weeks at the helm.

The change now is massive, hard earned and welcome. Just look to where West have slipped to.

To discount the challenge of the Italians would have been folly. They are a team full of endeavour and spirit. They can play too. It was never going to be easy for Gloucester, but they make life far harder for themselves than they should. To have conceded four tries will be a concern, but it was the manner in which they came that will worry most.

Gloucester, having played with discipline and control for 25 minutes, lost their grip and players of known quality need to start improving and the tactics need to be honed.

Firstly, Terry Fanolua needs to be involved more. He is criminally wasted on the wing and the tactic of using the barging Chris Yates renders Jason Little's participation virtually useless.

However, there were some crucial performances from the Cherry and Whites. Simon Mannix had a spectacular afternoon with the boot and Joe Ewens was again admirable in his work on the wing.

Up front, Gloucester's scrummage was efficient rather than its bruising, forthright self, despite Phil Vickery causing large problems for Andrea Casellani.

The work ethic cannot be denied and in Jake Boer and Steve Ojomoh, Gloucester possessed damaging ball carriers and crucial tacklers, but by the end it was Roma's back three who were in control.

These are not the calmest waters Saint-Andre and his team have sailed in.

There were enough warning signs here to say a massive improvement is needed before Cardiff's visit to Kingsholm on Saturday.

If Roma had believed in their credentials from the start, Gloucester's European dream could have been in tatters.

The worrying sign was of tetchy player bickering that is of serious concern because it is undermining all their good work.

At times, Gloucester had serious trouble in keeping the ball. The desire to force that extra pass or drive that extra yard forced mistakes and the Italians used their possession far better. Confidence is still fragile.

But Gloucester made such an explosive start, it looked little more than a training run. They drove large holes around the fringes and when Roma transgressed, Mannix made them pay.

They were going at a point a minute when Yates made a telling break and found Andy Hazell, who gave a neat pass to Ewens who skipped away from the cover to score.

At that point it was 25-3 and then perhaps thoughts turned to the quarters. Bad move.

Any team in this competition can punish you if you fall off the gas and this Italian side were no exception.

From then on the hosts starved Gloucester of any worthwhile or meaningful possession and roared back with full-back Alfredo De Angelis, the powerful Luke Gross and Ramiro Pez running at the Cherry and Whites with relish.

It was Gross who led a series of splendid drives and despite Roma spilling the ball forward early in the move, Nicholas Martin scored to the right of the posts.

Pez was beginning to find himself and with Gloucester still on the ropes, ghosted through their cover to score in the first half stoppage time.

Gloucester now had to win the match all over again. It is very hard to pick up the pace once it has been doused and Roma, to their superb credit, forced Gloucester back and used their ball far better.

It was a tense, twitching period but Mannix steadied the nerve when he punished replacements Alessio Murrazani's offence with his seventh penalty. But if Gloucester thought it was over, they were wrong.

A move, sustained through several phases of neat possession with Zisti and Giampiero De Carli heavily involved allowed De Angelis to surge over and score.

Pez's conversion took Roma to within four points and the colour in Gloucester cheeks was beginning to drain away, but they managed to score points when under pressure.

Mannix hit back when Murrazzani infringed again and Gloucester were safe when they fashioned a try for Little.

Tom Beim launched a counter attack and linked with Fanolua. Mannix came up down the outside and created room for Little to stroll over. That did not stop the Italians forcing their fourth try from Luca Corona, but as Saint-Andre will know, Gloucester was not built in a day.

ROMA: A. de Angelis; J. Keyter, G. Raineri, N. Zisti, L. Corona; R. Pez, G. Mazzi; A. Casellani (A. Murrazzani 63), G. de Carli, R. Martinez, L. Gross, F. Pennese, S. Virgilio, N. Martin (F. Ciciliano 63), C. Caione (c).

GLOUCESTER: T. Beim; T. Fanolua, J. Little, C. Yates, J. Ewens; S. Mannix, E. Moncrieff (I. Sanders 20); T. Woodman, O. Azam (C. Fortey 57), P. Vickery, R. Fidler, M. Cornwell, J. Boer, S. Ojomoh, A. Hazell (K. Jones 60).

Reps. not used: R. Greenslade-Jones, A. Eustace, A. Deacon.

REFEREE: F. Borreani (France)

ATTENDANCE: 1,500

STAR MAN: Jake Boer

JC