

THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2001

BATH HUMILIATE THE CHERRY AND WHITES

**GLOUCESTER SLUMP TO A MISERABLE SIX-TRY DEFEAT
AT THE REC**

BATH 50 GLOUCESTER 16

Gloucester collapsed to a half-century of points as Bath romped to a Premiership victory of clinical running dominance at the Rec.

Bath scored six well worked and beautifully executed tries to steam-roller Gloucester with 28 unanswered second period points to condemn Philippe Saint-Andre's men to their seventh league defeat in eight starts and may have also severed their chances in the end of season play-offs.

Gloucester tried hard, but Bath danced away with an awesome show of pacy running rugby to collect tries from a Mike Catt brace, Iain Balshaw, Shaun Berne, Ben Clarke and Matt Perry. Gloucester's only consolation was a try from Chris Catling.

The record spoke for itself and Gloucester knew they simply had to carve out a result at fiercest rivals Bath.

Steve Ojomoh replaced Junior Paramore who had a calf injury, but Gloucester made an excellent start.

Bath collapsed a scrum twice and Simon Mannix kicked the Cherry and Whites ahead from the half-way line.

However, it was obvious the way Bath wanted to play. They attempted to string pace into their movement whenever they could and it took them just five minutes to score.

Gloucester could not control the ball at a scrum and Iain Balshaw made a terrific pick up and hurtled forward. Mark Regan made a telling burst and when the ball came back to Mike Catt, he chipped beautifully into the arms of Balshaw on the right wing to score.

Mannix landed his second penalty but Gloucester were being sucked into a pace-orientated game. Their best hope was to slow the game down, dictate from the set piece and play the game on their terms.

Gloucester expended a massive amount of energy up front and stole two line-outs to cement their dominance up front, but they failed to score when Mannix missed two presentable penalties and Bath made them pay the heaviest of prices with their second try.

It was fantastic, because Bath simply came away with points and they grabbed their second score.

Gloucester were penalised for obstruction at the re-start and Catt hammered Gloucester back inside their half. Bath controlled a line-out and then a scrum and Kevin Maggs set Jason Little up like a kipper and Shaun Berne strolled away from Chris Catling and over.

It was looking pretty desperate for Gloucester at this stage. Although their forwards, real honest, hard working men, obtained enough possession, Bath were ready for their best midfielders, but they sprung the game wide open with a try from Catling.

Gloucester moved play to the right and when it came to the left, Catling broke away with a little show and left Balshaw and Matt Perry standing in his surge for the line.

It was all the more astonishing because there was just the feeling Bath should have been well ahead. They had such a serrated attacking edge out-wide, Gloucester had done superbly to remain so tightly gripped.

There was always the worry, however, that when Bath moved with such pace, Gloucester would run out of cover and the hosts secured their third try four minutes before the break.

However, it came from a Gloucester mistake when Andy Gomarsall's poorly directed kick was fielded by Matt Perry and he drove Bath to within striking distance and Ben Clarke was rumbled over the line.

Characteristically, it was all exceptionally niggly, but Gloucester remained with a scent. The next score would be crucial and if they could remain within striking distance, the work of the forwards may pay off.

Half-time: Bath 22, Gloucester 16

Gloucester had been in touch at the break but two Jon Preston penalties took Bath away to 28-16 and slowly the screw was being turned.

It was painful for Gloucester, because Bath had so much pace with which to make an impact. Play was infectiously loose, and both teams aimed to spread the ball when they could, but it was the blue machine who collected their fourth try.

Bath controlled a line-out and hammered play up the centre at a ferocious pace. Maggs took Catt's pass and fed him back for the England man to gas himself away from the cover, use Tom Voyce as a decoy and beat Catling to the corner.

Suddenly, it was all becoming too much for Gloucester and they could rarely escape the Bath clutches in the wide open spaces and the bedrock of their scrummage also suffered at the hands of the hosts who had found some quite sparkling form.

Despite some gutsy breaks from Little and a brutally honest performance from Adam Eustace, Gloucester were being made to look distinctly second class.

The straight line, cutting edge had taken its toll on Gloucester and after a searing break from Voyce, Perry came up on his outside, cut away from the cover and away for the fifth try. It was a complete shut out and while Bath had scored 21 points, Gloucester had not managed any.

Gloucester had severely suffered at the breakdown where they had not released the ball quickly enough and Bath kept the pressure on in the closing stages as Gloucester looked increasingly a well beaten side.

Catt chipped and chased, it looked perfect for Balshaw, but Catt collected the bounce and surged away to score Bath's sixth try. Preston converted to bring up the 50 and there was no time for Gloucester to regroup.

BATH: M. Perry; I. Balshaw, K. Maggs, S. Berne, M. Catt; J. Preston, S. Emms; M. Regan, J. Mallett, A. Lloyd, S. Borthwick, G. Thomas, B. Clarke (capt.), D. Lyle. *

Reps.: A. Williams, A. Long, D. Barnes, S. Cox, R. Thirlby, M. Haag, N. Thomas.

GLOUCESTER: C. Catling; T. Fanolua, J. Little, C. Yates, T. Beam; S. Mannix, A. Gomarsall; T. Woodman, O. Azam, P. Vickery, A. Eustace, I. Jones, J. Boer, K. Jones (capt.), S. Ojomoh.

Reps.: B. Hayward, R. Greenslade-Jones, A. Hazell, C. Fortey, A. Deacon, M. Cornwell, E. Pearce.

REFEREE: P. O'Brien (New Zealand)

STAR MAN: Adam Eustace

* *NB. Starting forwards as published*