

# THE CITIZEN

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## FOOTBALL

### GLOUCESTER'S USUAL DEFEAT AT PONTYPOOL

#### WELSH REFEREES AND INTERPRETATION OF RULES

Gloucester, with a more representative team than usual when visiting Wales, had hopes of breaking the long record of defeats, dating back to season 1907-8, sustained at Pontypool, but the City were no more successful last Saturday than on former occasions. As at Swansea in February, Gloucester opened the scoring, but failed to keep the lead, though the visitors were only a couple of points in arrears a few minutes before the finish. Near the end a missed pass by Prior gave Pontypool a try under the posts, and a successful conversion made Gloucester's defeat appear more decisive than it really was.

Pontypool drop out of Gloucester's programme for next season, and the City players will not regret missing this "rush" fixture. Last week the kick-off was delayed until 4.30, and the team had to catch the 6.10 back or face the pleasant (!) prospect of getting home after midnight.

"D.G.C.," commenting on the Pontypool match, writes : —

Gloucester have never won at Pontypool, and it is quite safe to say that if Gloucester visited the Monmouthshire centre once a season during the next hundred years under similar circumstances as those which attended last Saturday's match they never would win there.

One is not making any attempt to find thin excuses for the City's defeat by 13 points to 6, because on the play as it actually went Pontypool deserved victory by a small margin, and no fault could be found with the manner in which the five tries of the match were scored.

Pontypool's method of converting two tries, however, was open to the gravest objection, as were other incidents in this game. The refereeing was so distinctly at variance with the English interpretation of the Rugby code of laws that for the good of the game all round it is essential that the Welsh Rugby Union should take steps to insist on greater uniformity. English clubs, for instance, cannot understand why Welsh clubs at home should be allowed to do things in a match which English players know very well are taboo to them, and which they do not attempt to copy.

It is hopeless to expect anything like general satisfaction amongst clubs visiting the Principality until the Welsh referees, or those responsible for their administration, get into a round-table conference with English referees and agree on one set of interpretations of the laws of the game.

"Soccer" is an anathema to many devout Rugby followers, but it offers a good example to the handling code so far as its international rules are concerned. English Soccer clubs playing in Wales play under exactly the same rules. The Welsh Soccer referees interpret the laws of the game exactly the same as the English referees. But the Welsh Rugby Union, either in theory or practice, allows a divergent interpretation from that of the English Rugby Union, and on no other ground can the practice of many Welsh referees be explained.

One can cite a very appropriate illustration. When Pontypool were at Kingsholm last December they lost by 8 points to 6, having the goal points for one of their tries disallowed owing to what the English referee considered was an infringement in placing the ball, the placer having his hands on the leather when it was kicked. Mr. Morgan Moses, of Machen, who refereed Gloucester's match at Pontypool last Saturday, allowed the home club's conversion of two tries even although the placer had his hands on the ball when kicked. The second conversion, in fact, was made while the placer held the ball clear of the ground with his hands !

Voyce, I think, spoke to Mr. Moses about this. What the referee said I do not know, nor would it have any bearing. The fact that he allowed the practice and allowed the full points showed the hopelessness of the lack of uniformity, and demonstrated the impossibility of visiting clubs doing themselves justice under such conditions. When the Welsh clubs find they cannot take similar liberties under English referees there are ructions.

Again, Mr. Moses allowed the Pontypool scrum-half the greatest latitude in putting the ball into the scrums. When the ball passed clean through the two packs the referee wanted it put in again, naturally; but when Crane threw it against the legs of the Pontypool wing forward and it rebounded to him, Mr. Moses was passive and allowed play to go on. Had Milliner adopted this method of putting the ball "into" the scrum it would have been interesting to know what Mr. Moses would have done, but the City scrum-half followed his usual practice and tried to put the ball in in the orthodox, or English manner.

One could not grumble at Mr. Moses personally for these interpretations because he and other Welsh referees are accustomed to the practice and will continue to be so until the ruling authorities come to agreement on the interpretation of the laws.

After all, the spirit of the game is not elusive, and it was the recognition of this that led the Gloucester players to take all these decisions as they came. They played a sporting game under circumstances that would have led some teams to adopt retaliatory measures quite outside the spirit of the game.

Mr. Moses was obsessed with the idea of off-side, and the match was not ten minutes old when he had penalised Gloucester four times for this breach, mostly in open play. Ultimately Mr. Moses shouted, so that all the players and the 2,000 spectators could hear, "I'll make you (Gloucester) fellows play on-side." Perhaps the Pontypool crowd had visions of the Gloucester fifteen being sent to the dressing-room for being off-side!

This "sergeant-major" example of refereeing was not directed at Pontypool, however, for it was learned after the match that Mr. Moses told a Pontypool forward who deliberately struck Ford while in the scrum that he would be sent to the dressing-room on a repetition of such conduct. The 2,000 spectators did not hear that shouted by Mr. Moses.

If Pontypool had won by the score which stood at 8 points to 6 in their favour with two minutes to go it would have been a more accurate representation of how play went, as the five points which made their tally thirteen were in the nature of a gift from Prior. Milliner whipped the ball to Thomas from a scrum five yards off the Gloucester line. Thomas gave to Prior who was standing practically under the cross-bar. The Gloucester right centre was too eager, for in attempting to take the perfect pass he fumbled, and before he could recover Rees dashed up, grabbed the ball, and touched down behind the posts for Cliff Richards to convert.

The City might have made more use of the first half when they had a strong wind behind them. It certainly looked as if Gloucester were to win when Crowther got the first try as the result of his good judgment in following up, but subsequently there was some bad passing by the threes.

On another occasion Brown ran well near the touch-line and punted over the home full-back's head. Instead of being allowed free play Brown was deliberately and violently shouldered into touch. Mr. Moses apparently did not see this glaring example of obstruction, although he followed up Brown's kick.

In this half the Gloucester forwards played with their customary keenness, but they were up against forwards who possessed just as much dash and vigour, and who were able to counteract the City pack's superiority and cleverness. Voyce was well marked from start to finish, and was not so much in evidence. One missed the individual touches characteristic of the International's general tactics.

It was just on the interval that Pontypool got the equalising try, Vaisey taking advantage of slackness in marking by touching down behind the posts for C. Richards to convert.

Pontypool's aggressiveness was increased when they had the wind behind them in the second half, and it must be said they made more use of it than Gloucester had done. But the City really showed greater powers of resistance, especially after the home club had added to their lead. This came through Pontypool's best try, in which Vaisey made a touch-line dash and passed inwards to James for the latter to side-step Millington and touch down.

The City's reply was most spirited, in spite of the disappointments caused by some of the referee's queer rulings, and led up to what a Pontypool supporter sportingly declared was "the" movement of the match. From some loose play just beyond the Gloucester 25 Brown got the ball and immediately ran for the line. He had not much room, but his pace and ability to avoid tacklers took him right up the field. Inside the home 25 he outwitted his opponents and passed in to Hughes, who finished the movement by swerving past the full-back and touching down. Millington's kick was charged down, some of the Pontypool players being about a couple of yards from the ball when the City full-back booted it. What the Pontypool men were doing there only they and Mr. Moses knew; Millington was dumbfounded.

It took all Pontypool's resources to keep two splendid long dribbles by the Gloucester forwards from materialising after that. Then just before the end the home club had a slice of the greatest good fortune by which they had the present of a try.

Millington came out of the ordeal with much success. Welsh forwards are not always easy to stop, especially when things are going well for them, but some of Millington's tackles were the essence of thoroughness. He was frequently buffeted about by opponents who did not believe in delicate handling, and it was interesting to note that he exhibited more quickness of action in kicking out when hard pressed than he had been showing in previous matches this season.

Brown and Hughes were again the City's strongest wing, though, like Prior and Crowther, they were not often enough in action so far as handling was concerned.

Prior was responsible for the breakdown of more than one movement, and this was wholly attributable to his anxiety to do well. He showed plenty of speed and lacked nothing in resolution, but his over-eagerness was fatal at critical moments. Keeness is a quality that no one wants to curb, and last Saturday's experience will probably do more than anything else to bring steadiness into Prior's play.

Thomas played a wonderfully effective game at stand-off half, both in attack and defence, and was one of the best men in the game. Milliner was between the "devil and the deep sea," what with the roving commission of Crane, the Pontypool scrum-half, and the idiosyncrasies of the referee, and his task was far from being a happy one. He was quite sprightly through it all, and did some valuable work in the loose.

Seabrook was an outstanding forward, especially in the second half, while Ford, Hall, Short and Hemmings were also prominent in a pack which was always too acutely observed by the gentleman with the whistle.

Considering Pontypool were without Goldsworthy, one of their cleverest three-quarters, and a number of their best forwards, all on the injured list, their display was very creditable and stamped them as a team not to be lightly reckoned by the strongest opponents. They have several young players of much promise.

C. Ford, the full-back, gave a very steady display, being cool and confident in all his work. His fielding of the ball was delightfully clean, in spite of the awkward way in which it often came to him through the gusts of wind. Vaisey and James made an enterprising left wing, though it was curious that they affected a score on the only occasion on which they used the reverse pass. I believe this was the case also when Brown and Hughes collaborated in their try.

The home forwards made up in vigour what they lacked in ability as controllers in loose play, and while one does not suggest that there was an undue amount of questionable tactics in the game as a whole, the fact remains that Pontypool were unintentionally given too much latitude. The spirit (and the laws) of the game provide for both teams in a match receiving equal consideration from the official in charge, and I am convinced that Mr. Moses was so keen to see that Gloucester's infringements of rules like that concerning the off-side were duly penalised that he failed to observe similar shortcomings on the part of Pontypool, besides interpreting other things in a way that the home team and the home crowd were accustomed to, and Gloucester were not.

The Gloucester team will wind up the season with a tour in Devon, meeting Devonport Services, Plymouth Albion, and Sidmouth on Saturday, Monday and Tuesday respectively. Eighteen players will make the journey, and it is hoped a full side will be available. The team will start on the tour next Friday evening, and their headquarters over the week-end will be at Plymouth. Mr. Arthur Hudson will be in charge, and with a continuance of the fine weather experienced recently, the trip should prove a most enjoyable one.

JC