

THE CITIZEN

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RUGBY REFLECTIONS – FROM W.B.'s NOTEBOOK

CITY'S DEFEAT AT LEICESTER

DOUBTFUL TRY AND PENALTY DECISION

BOUGHTON AT HIS BEST

Gloucester have put up some remarkably good fights at Leicester with disorganised sides – and more than once returned home victorious – but whilst the City fully maintained their reputation in the former respect on Saturday, they had to acknowledge defeat by 12 points to 3.

On the face of it the margin looks pretty decisive, but Leicester had the benefit of six points as the result of decisions on the part of the referee which were, to say the least, very much open to doubt. In the case of Russell's try, the point was scored on the opposite side of the field to where I was sitting, and it was impossible for me to offer a decided opinion, but the Gloucester players were unanimous that the ball was not grounded over the line. Russell appeared to barge through the scrum five yards out, and was held up. There was a general melee, and when the players had sorted themselves the referee awarded a try, the official over-ruling the strong protests of the visitors.

It was a critical point in the game, for the scores were three each, and twenty minutes of the second half had been played. Gloucester felt a bit sore over the decision, but they had more cause for complaint when Prentice put Leicester still further in front as the result of a penalty goal within another three minutes. It was a magnificent kick from half-way, but the referee made a serious error in awarding the penalty. It was given against Price, the Gloucester scrum half for an alleged off-side tackle.

The incident took place right in front of the Press seats, and I saw what actually happened. Leicester had heeled from the scrum and the ball was well outside. Russell was a bit slow in gathering, and before he could get the ball away Price had slipped round and checked his opponent. It was perfectly legitimate, and I was amazed at the referee's ruling.

However, Gloucester had to take the decision, and with six points practically given the Midlanders the City's hopes of sharing honours and, perhaps, winning the game were dashed. Before the end Leicester added another try – the outcome of a smart bit of combination between Cramphorn and Buckingham – and Gloucester finished nine points down.

Considering the City had a third of the [passage of unknown length unreadable] side away – Stephens, McCanlis, Tomlinson, Davies, and Hemming – whilst Leicester had the strongest team out for [short passage unreadable] weeks, their performance was a highly meritorious one. The visitors' back division was sadly disorganised with both centres away, and that combination was more or less at a discount was only to be expected.

In attack the City failed, even allowing their opportunities were limited. But the players excelled in defence, and with splendid help from the forwards the home backs were continually pulled up or forced to give erratic transfers. Loveridge, Hoare and Abbey were particularly prominent for deadly tackling; if the players had possessed the necessary thrust and finish on the few occasions they were given the ball a different result might have been recorded.

Gloucester's best opening occurred a few minutes before the interval. Price secured a lovely opening, and after James had handled, Hoare was given possession with one man to beat and Abbey and Loveridge outside him. Gloucester visitors were preparing to shout, for it looked a certain try, but there was a groan of disappointment when Hoare gave an impossible transfer to Abbey.

There were one or two occasions in the second half when the City worked through and up to their opponents' line, but the forwards could not pierce the defence, and, as already observed, the rear division had not the ability or skill to take full advantage. This weakness has been more or less evident in the majority of matches and I had to give this explanation to an old Gloucesterian present at Saturday's match who remarked : "I like the forwards immensely, but the backs are a good bit below the old standard."

Abbey had to revert to the centre position last week, and he was a hard and keen worker but the line as a whole did not inspire any confidence when on the aggressive. Price, on his second appearance as deputy scrum worker showed great promise, especially in getting the ball away. It was not often the City forwards obtained the ball in the scrums, but when it did come out cleanly, Price never failed to throw out fast and accurate transfers. He battled bravely against a big opponent in Russell, and never shirked going down to rushes. I have only seen Price on two occasions and he has favourably impressed each time; my only doubt is whether his slight physique would stand the test of strenuous first-class football week after week. James again figured at outside half, and did some useful kicking and dribbling, but he was not given much scope to initiate attacking movements.

Leicester had Russell and Greenlees (the Scottish International) at half back, and the latter was fed continuously with a beautiful service. Greenlees has a perfect pair of hands, and he gave his centres no end of opportunities, but concerted attacks broke down repeatedly in the first half.

There was a decided improvement in the later stages, but Leicester should have done infinitely better with the chances provided them. Finding his efforts meeting with such little success, Greenlees tried breaking through on his own, and once or twice he looked like clearing the defenders, but a Gloucester player always appeared at the critical moment and effected the necessary check.

The only try that came from passing was the second one a few minutes before the finish. Then the visitors were caught napping. The ball came out from the loose with no one in immediate attendance, and it was left to Cramphorn to gather and break away on the left. The Gloucester defence was out of position, and Buckingham had a gift try.

The Leicester three-quarters were speedy, especially the wings, and if Farndon and Flewitt had been efficiently served there might have been some free scoring. But neither of the centres were up to form, and Buckingham especially disappointed, as he did at Kingsholm earlier in the season. Flewitt displayed dash and determination on a few occasions, but the tackling was too good for him. Farndon did not get a real chance; he went over the line once, but a forward pass had been given and he was called back.

Forward, Leicester had a big pull in weight, and this gave them a distinct advantage in the scrummages. Their work here was excellent, but Gloucester gave the opposition a worrying time in the loose.

The City pack were much better together than against Cardiff; they marked relentlessly, and combined in some brilliant dribbles which only just failed in bringing tangible results. Right at the start the Leicester line had two narrow escapes, and these dashing efforts were repeated later in the game.

It was the forwards who carried the City on Saturday, and but for their splendid all-round work the defeat would have been much heavier. Franklin came in the pack vice Hemming, and he proved extremely useful in the open, with Saxby, Foulkes, and Comley also distinguished for special efforts. Wadley and Carpenter were tireless all through, and Cuffe and Hiam had their periods of success. The play of the City front was generally admired, and a Leicester player paid full tribute to their liveliness and determination in a conversation I had with him at the tea table after the match. The City pack came into their own again last week, and all credit to the players for a fine showing.

Leicester had G. R. Beamish away, but the forwards were a hefty lot, and much stronger than in the first match at Kingsholm. Still, they had to admit they had opposed to them a pack of real merit, who gave nothing away in dash and keenness. Prentice, the ex-English forward, was very prominent in the lines out, and Dunkley was a fast and dangerous player in the open. Colman and Norman, too, were often conspicuous, and those players took a lot of looking after. The Leicester men were more inclined to open out than the visitors, but the passes were not always well-judged, and a more alert opposition might have made better use of stray chances that were afforded. Apart from the refereeing, Gloucester thoroughly enjoyed the game, and the team had a good reputation.

One of the features of Saturday's match was the splendid goal-kicking, from penalties by Prentice and Boughton. All three shots were taken from practically half-way, two from near the touch-line, and the success of the respective kickers was heartily applauded.

Boughton came right back to his best at Leicester, and his polished display was greatly admired. He has never kicked with better judgment, and two or three of his punts to touch carried more than half the length of the field. On the day, Boughton was the all-round superior of Manson, who was in difficulties more than once.

Leicester are on tour in the West this weekend, playing Bristol, Plymouth Albion, and Bath. It will be interesting to see how the Midlanders fare in these three games.