

THE CITIZEN

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 1984

IRISH END BONANZA

LONDON IRISH 19 Pts., GLOUCESTER 16 Pts.

This fixture had always looked the biggest stumbling block to Gloucester's month of success – and so it proved to be.

Their eight-match unbeaten run foundered in a near gale at Sunbury as they failed to top 20 points for the first time in five weeks.

But it was the cruel weather as much as the stern Irish resolve that brought a halt to Gloucester's winning bonanza.

The Cherry and Whites were battered by a strengthening wind and a spell of driving rain in the first half. It kept them out of contention despite a fiery first few minutes and by half time they were 19-nil down.

Ironically, the elements decided to take a rest at half time as well as the players and Irish eyes were smiling at the restart.

RAIN

There was still sufficient wind to give Gloucester advantage but the rain had died away and the Irish stuck firmly to the task of defending their big lead.

Gradually, Gloucester whittled it away, showing creditable resolve and strength of character. They reduced the arrears to three points and were pressing strongly on the Irish line when London referee Roger Quittenton decided their time was up.

It was, therefore, the proverbial 'game of two halves' thanks to the climatic conditions and the only distinction between the sides at the end of it all was a single penalty.

Gloucester, however, were not too disappointed at their misfortune. Acting skipper Paul Taylor commented: "I think it is just a little hiccup in our good recovery of the last few weeks.

"We were unlucky with the weather but we gave as good as we got and we feel we did the best possible in the circumstances. The unfortunate thing is that it brings our unbeaten run to an end, but I'm sure we can get another winning sequence going."

INJURIES

Despite the shortcomings due to injuries and County calls, Gloucester's pack performed well, particularly in the loose and line-outs. In the scrums the Irish generally had the edge and took a strike against the head in the first half, which led to Gloucester being penalised and Irish outside half Paul O'Donnell putting another three points on the board.

Gloucester half-backs Marcus Hannaford and Mike Hamlin gave a superb lead on such a difficult day. Hamlin's determined efforts were rewarded with a try and he was unlucky not to get another.

Before the interval the Irish had built up their lead with three penalties by O'Donnell, and tries from lock Brendan Mays – who battled through from a line out – and Tony McFarlane. His fine score resulted from a flowing series of passes and O'Donnell converted.

Tim Smith began Gloucester's second half comeback with two penalties; then came Hamlin's try. It resulted from a good Gloucester back row break with Ian Smith almost reaching the line and then Hamlin beating two tackles to dive forcefully over. Smith's conversion shot was wide.

Four minutes from the end Gloucester's hopes of snatching victory must have soared when they ran a penalty and Nigel Scrivens burst through on the charge. Smith converted and Gloucester kept up the pressure to the end – but ran out of time.

London Irish: P. Snoddy; A. McFarlane, J. Garvey, D. O'Shea, D. Walsh; P. O'Donnell, B. Murphy (capt.); A. Newberry, M. Leonard, D. McGauley, B. Mayes, B. Casey, J. O'Neill, M. Connelly, C. Christopher.

Gloucester: T. Smith; J. Breeze, P. Taylor (capt.), R. Mogg, N. Price; M. Hamlin, M. Hannaford; P. Jones, K. White, R. Phillips, N. Scrivens, J. Brain, J. Bennett, I. Smith, L. Cummins.

MAN OF THE MATCH: Mike Hamlin.

JC