

THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2001

TIGERS FIGHT BACK TO INFLICT CRUSHING DEFEAT
GLOUCESTER IN CHARGE AT HALF-TIME BUT CHAMPIONS
SHOW THEIR TRUE CLASS

GLOUCESTER 18 LEICESTER 40

Leicester handed Gloucester a Premiership mauling with a four-try virtuoso display to confirm their status as the hottest team in the land.

Gloucester were ripped apart in the second period with tries from Geordan Murphy, Steve Booth, and a Lewis Moody brace, to turn a seemingly desperate situation into Leicester's biggest win at Kingsholm.

Gloucester led 15-3 at the break with five Ludovic Mercier penalties, and were good value for their lead, but Leicester turned on the style to leave Kingsholm stunned.

Before the match, Kingsholm stood in a minute's silent contemplation of the events in America, before erupting in a roar of anticipation.

The sobering crowd then chimed into life for the visit of European Champions Leicester.

Kingsholm was jammed to the rafters and watched Leicester strike first for an early lead.

Gloucester recovered the re-start and Ludovic Mercier ran back into the danger area to concede a penalty for not releasing.

Tim Stimpson made no mistake, but from then on, Gloucester imposed themselves on the game.

The distance Mercier gets with his boot pinned Leicester deep inside their half.

Mercier struck Gloucester level and handed them the lead when Freddi Tuilagi was penalised.

It was a raucous start, brimming with intent and physical power.

When Tuilagi blocked off a break by Daren O'Leary, Mercier landed his third penalty. Leicester had not dealt with Mercier's boot and Gloucester preyed on their weakness.

It was Terry Fanolua's turn to chase a huge kick and he rattled into Stimpson to win a penalty which Mercier converted for a 12-3 lead.

Gloucester were dominant in almost every phase and aimed to be as disruptive as possible in every department, particularly the line-out, where Adam Eustace and Rob Fidler were as hard working as ever.

But they could not cut open the Tigers defence to grab the score they wanted to blow the game wide open.

They should have done so when Mercier recycled into his forwards and Alex Stoica shipped a pass on to Junior Paramore, who battled back and he found Daren O'Leary.

O'Leary skated down the right but was bundled into touch by Stimpson.

Gloucester had almost scored before that when a riveting passage of play almost resulted in a comedy try. Mercier's left boot was again at the heart of the move when his kick was knocked forward by Tuilagi.

He managed to recover as Fanolua charged forward, but Andy Goode's kick went straight up and behind the try line. Fanolua, however, could not take the catch for the try.

Leicester, minus their British Lions, were seriously under the cosh; so much so, that they looked a shadow of the side that were crowned Premiership champions last season.

Mercier piled on the agony by slotting another penalty to put Gloucester 15-3 in front.

Stimpson missed a penalty before Leicester woke from their slumber in the dying stages of the half.

Referee Goodliffe infuriated the home crowd when he allowed Leicester to re-take a tap penalty, despite Daren Garforth knocking on, and they finished the period with a Stimpson penalty but it was definitely Gloucester's half.

Half-time: Gloucester 15, Leicester 6

Gloucester extended their lead to 18-6 when Mercier landed his sixth successful penalty, but then Gloucester's world started to fall apart.

From the kick-off, Goode's kick was gathered by Lewis Moody, who managed to catch the re-start from Fanolua and he charged towards the posts for the try. Nobody managed to get near him. Stimpson converted and Leicester were within five points.

The try came from nothing. It had undone all of Gloucester's good work and then came the squeeze.

This was Leicester at their best. They were combative up front and hard hitting in defence and Gloucester's game, based so much around territory in the first half, fell away.

There was no release, no outlet they could rely on. It was now down to hard work and honesty, but their lead, once 12 points, had been whittled down and Leicester took the lead.

The Tigers had introduced their Lions and as soon as Martin Johnson entered the arena, they scored again.

He snapped a line-out and was at the heart of a stirring drive. Austin Healey dragged play left, Rod Kafer held up play and Goode slipped Moody in again for his second. Stimpson converted and Leicester were now ahead by a try.

Goode had earlier landed a drop-goal from the half-way line to start the recovery and it required something breathtaking now.

Gloucester needed something to cling to and it should have arrived with 13 minutes remaining.

Mercier swung play to the left and Jake Boer, as hard working and diligent as ever, broke the first line of defence and off-loaded to Hazell, breaking towards the line, but he spilled the pass and in that moment, summed up Gloucester's afternoon.

This was about as bad as it could get, and yet it got worse.

The handling in midfield had been shaky all afternoon and when O'Leary coughed up possession, Leicester gathered and Steve Booth raced away, crossed the 22 and ran in to score.

Three tries without reply and utter dominance. Gloucester had been shown the hard way why Leicester are the best team in the country.

Still Leicester were not finished and went looking for the third try that would confirm them as leaders of the Premiership.

It got niggly towards the end, Patrice Collazo involving himself in a number of little spats, but no-one could question Leicester's class when Geordan Murphy scored a quite brilliant individual try.

He waltzed through Gloucester's defence before rounding Stoica for Leicester's fourth try. Stimpson converted and Gloucester were gone – sunk without a trace.

GLOUCESTER: A. Stoica; D. O'Leary, J. Ewens, T. Fanolua; D. Albanese; L. Mercier, D. Yachvili; T. Woodman, O. Azam, P. Vickery (c), R. Fidler, A. Eustace, J. Boer, A. Hazell, J. Paramore.
Reps.: A. Gomarsall, S. Mannix, J. Simpson-Daniel, P. Collazo, C. Fortey, J. Forrester, M. Cornwell.

LEICESTER: T. Stimpson; G. Murphy, G. Gelderbloom, R. Kafer, F. Tuilagi; A. Goode, H. Ellis; G. Rowntree (c), D. West, D. Garforth, L. Deacon, B. Kay, P. Gustard, L. Moody, P. Short.
Reps.: G. Chuter, M. Corry, M. Johnson, A. Healey, S. Booth, N. Back, D. Jelley.

REFEREE: R. Goodliffe (RFU).

STAR MAN: —

JC