

# THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2001

## FOUR-TRY GLOUCESTER CRASH THROUGH SALE MERCIER BOOTS 24 POINTS IN CHERRY AND WHITES STUNNING DISPLAY

SALE 21 GLOUCESTER 44

Problems, what problems? Gloucester produced a deadly full-frontal display to crush Sale Sharks and grab a bonus point in a Cherry and White haze at Heywood Road.

Gloucester were irresistible up front and ripped the previously unbeaten Sharks to shreds to score tries through Trevor Woodman, Dimitri Yachvili, Terry Fanolua and Federico Pucciariello.

It had Kingsholm owner Tom Walkinshaw saluting his team from the stand as Philippe Saint-Andre congratulated his players on the field.

Ludovic Mercier landed 24 points, including three drop-goals as Gloucester silenced their critics in astonishing style.

It did not start well as sprightly breaks from Stuart Pinkerton and Jason Robinson forced Gloucester onto the back foot. They were penalised when Charlie Hodgson chipped deep into Gloucester territory.

Hodgson made no mistake, but Gloucester steamed back and from the re-start Sale were penalised for standing up in the scrum and Mercier made no mistake.

It was just what Gloucester needed and they showed their power with a vigorous drive from a line-out on half way with Patrice Collazo and Olivier Azam at its heart.

Mercier struck Gloucester ahead after more hard work by the forwards forced Sale to handle on the floor.

It was fast and open and Sale responded when Robinson sprung an attack from deep and Martin Shaw broke midfield.

Mercier was sin-binned for pulling back at Sanderson and Hodgson equalised with his second penalty.

But despite being a man down, without Mercier, Gloucester kept it tight and drove at the heart of Sale's pack. They were rewarded after 24 minutes with the game's opening try, and it was a beauty.

Rob Fidler won a line-out from a long-rang penalty and the Cherry and Whites swarmed forward through six or seven short range blasts and finally peeled away to the right and Trevor Woodman was crashed over for the score.

Mercier returned, and immediately landed a drop-goal to extend Gloucester's lead to 14-6 after 27 minutes of rip-roaring rugby.

Gloucester were on top here, but could not put the squeeze on and with seven minutes of the half remaining conceded a try.

It was Hodgson at its heart, pounding through Gloucester's midfield defence and racing towards the corner before being bundled out, but he managed to get his kick away and Robinson was on hand to score.

It was a soft try from Gloucester's point of view, but Hodgson was growing into the match and another lovely break and timed pass put Dan Harris through and although Stoica tackled Pinkerton, he was sent to the sin-bin for playing the ball on the floor. Hodgson converted to level the scores.

Half-time: Sale 14, Gloucester 14

It did not take Gloucester long to re-establish an iron-like grip up front in a stirring display of power based brutality. It was the way they would win the game and they knew it.

Mercier missed an early penalty when Adam Eustace was pulled down in a line-out, but Gloucester did not waver. Collazo, Woodman, Eustace and Co. worked relentlessly to hem Sale back and Mercier landed a penalty when Sale were penalised for holding on.

Gloucester toughed it out with far more conviction than Sale, who could not muster any significant progress. They then broke the game when Dimitri Yachvili, spiky and competitive as ever, intercepted a pass from Shaw to burst away beneath the posts for the score. Mercier converted and then landed a drop-goal to extend Gloucester's lead to 27-14.

It might have been basic, but it was convincing and hard edged and it had established them a winning lead.

It was not the most fluid display in the world, but Gloucester did not care. The ball hardly ever appeared to go outside Mercier, but Joe Ewens and Fanolua were tighter in defence when called up.

Mercier landed two more penalties to stretch Gloucester to 30-14, before they grabbed their third try with a move that began on half-way.

Daren O'Leary made the initial surge after Sale had coughed up possession. He linked infield and Yachvili, spotting a huge overlap, kicked to the far side. Josh Frape gathered and passed inside to Ewens; Bier arrived in support and Fanolua was on hand to crash over from short range in the opposite corner from where the move started. Mercier converted, and glory be, Gloucester sensed a bonus point.

Perhaps Saint-Andre and Walkinshaw would dine out after all. They nearly got it when Ewens burst through midfield, but could not find Fanolua on his shoulder.

This, although limited, was perfectly executed and buys Saint-Andre crucial time to mould his team. Gloucester were heading for a complete shut out, before Joss Baxendall was on hand to finish off a lovely move he started in midfield. Hodgson converted, but Gloucester bristled back.

Ewens, having a splendid match, carved forward and Ed Pearce linked to the far side. James Simpson-Daniel, on for Stoica, cut inside but Gloucester were held just short. But they were not to be denied and they hammered Sale up front for Federico Pucciariello to score his first try for Gloucester. Mercier converted as Gloucester collected their bonus point.

SALE: J. Robinson; S. Davidson, M. Shaw, D. Harris, S. Hanley; C. Hodgson, J. Bramhall, K. Yates, A. Titterell, S. Turner, I. Fullerton, S. Lines, S. Pinkerton, A. Sanderson (capt.), P. Anglesea.  
Reps.: A. Dickens, V. Going, J. Baxendall, A. Perelini, M. Giarcheri, A. Black, B. Jackman.

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

REFEREE: A. Rowden (Berkshire).

STAR MAN: Joe Ewens.

JC