

# THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2001

## GLOUCESTER DO ENOUGH TO DEFEAT LA ROCHELLE CHERRY AND WHITES START THEIR SHIELD CAMPAIGN WITH A THREE-TRY VICTORY

GLOUCESTER 34 LA ROCHELLE 15

It was far from pretty, but Gloucester got their Parker Pen Shield adventure off to a three-try start against a dogged La Rochelle.

Gloucester scored tries through Junior Paramore, Alessandro Stoica and Joe Ewens, but it certainly did not match the heights of their thumping win at Sale and Ludovic Mercier landed 19 points, before departing with a leg injury.

Gloucester ripped into La Rochelle from the start and Ludovic Mercier's booming left foot set up an immediate attack deep in the far right corner and when Gloucester won a scrum, he kicked ahead when La Rochelle were penalised for collapsing.

Joe Ewens, an early replacement for Daren O'Leary, fielded a high kick and linked with Dimitri Yachvili and Mercier in midfield.

Robert Todd, making a heavyweight return from injury, found Terry Fanolua and his pass put James Simpson-Daniel away. He looked certain to score only for Federico Todeschini to knock the ball out of his hand.

But it did not take long for Gloucester to make the break through. Alessandro Stoica straightened an attack from deep, Todd and Fanolua were both involved, and from the fifth phase, La Rochelle ran out of defenders and Mercier put Junior Paramore in for the try.

It was a great score, and although Todeschini replied with a penalty, Gloucester were well on top. All the new boys, including Koli Sewabu, had settled very well and Mercier stretched Gloucester 13-3 ahead with his second penalty after 17 minutes.

Gloucester had the edge up front, a resounding platform from which to build. The work was hard and honest in the middle of the half, and the Cherry and Whites grabbed their second try to establish a good lead.

La Rochelle could not prevent Gloucester driving hard from their line-out and finally, from a series of shoves, Stoica emerged from the bottom of the maul with the try.

There was plenty of diligent work from Paramore, Fortey, Fidler and Phil Vickery, but for all their endeavour, Gloucester could not score a third try.

Yachvili and Mercier were hungry for further success, but they had to settle for a Mercier penalty and then they lost Adam Eustace, sinbinned for diving over a ruck.

From a hot, desperate start, Gloucester had hit the buffers at the end of the period and were denied a third try by a combination of poor delivery and good defence.

Half-time: Gloucester 21, La Rochelle 3

Gloucester tried to establish some game winning momentum immediately after the re-start when Fanolua crashed through midfield on a superb run, but his attempted try-scoring pass to Ewens was intercepted by number eight Marc Fiorese.

From there, Gloucester never recovered and conceded a try of startling simplicity. Lock Julien Pierre drove forward and Todeschini was heavily involved to glide through a gap in midfield.

He seemed certain to score but was denied by a brilliant tackle from Ewens. Laurent Albinet, a stocky hooker took up the challenge and skidded round Stoica, only for Paramore to thunder him down. But Gloucester could not keep them out and from a tap penalty, Albinet crashed through from a flying maul.

It was exactly what Gloucester did not need and put La Rochelle back in the game, but the Cherry and Whites hit back when Todd linked with Simpson-Daniel and he gave a beautiful little show and reverse pass to Ewens who scored in the far corner. Mercier nailed a superb conversion, and Gloucester [were] 34-10 ahead.

There were hard working displays from Vickery, Eustace, Fanolua and Todd, but it was not the type of home performance Saint-Andre would have hoped for.

Vincent Debaty sliced home for a try and it was only what La Rochelle deserved, before both teams were reduced to 14 men for the second time when Stoica was binned for throwing a punch alongside Matt Tetlow.

GLOUCESTER: A. Stoica; D. O'Leary, T. Fanolua, R. Todd, J. Simpson-Daniel; L. Mercier, D. Yachvili; P. Vickery (capt.), C. Fortey, F. Pucciariello, R. Fidler, E. Pearce, A. Eustace, K. Sewabu, J. Paramore.

Reps.: A. Gomarsall, J. Goodridge, J. Ewens, A. Deacon, O. Azam, J. Forrester, M. Cornwell.

LA ROCHELLE: D. Giannantonio; F. Brunet, M. Tetlow, Y. Dekkiche, F. Toata; F. Todeschini, C. Larue; L. Faure, L. Albinet (capt.), Y. Lacrouts, C. Yandell, J. Pierre, S. Bonneau, N. Harvey, M. Fiorese.

Reps.: J. C. Vicard, G. Orial, S. Bozzi, V. Debaty, N. Djebaili, J. P. Elissalde, J. F. Bouche.

REFEREE: M. Salera (Italy).

STAR MAN: Joe Ewens.