

# THE CITIZEN

MONDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2001

IRISH ON A HIGH AFTER ANOTHER VICTORY

LONDON IRISH 19 GLOUCESTER 15

Irish eyes will be more than smiling this morning – they will be positively Guinness-glazed after a wonderful 48 hours.

Not only did England run into a sensationally committed Irish wall at Lansdowne Road on Saturday, but Gloucester had their noses rubbed in it at the Madejski Stadium yesterday – the Craic lives on after a ferocious Premiership struggle.

It was a truly remarkable game – a match in which Gloucester did enough to win but still left the field a dishevelled and dispirited-looking side.

They could have won and know they need to win these matches if they are to finish in the top four of the Zurich Premiership.

Gloucester worked with a pumping passion in the second period to overcome a horrendous half-time deficit.

But the Irish held on thanks to their sheer want and relentless desire to tackle themselves to a standstill – their defence was outstanding.

London Irish deserved their win because they took advantage of the gifts offered to them and then managed to shut out their revitalised opponents in the second half.

But that does not begin to tell even half the story.

Gloucester trailed 19-0 at the break; an astonishing scoreline given their territorial dominance and the number of chances they dug out for themselves.

Their aim had been to establish a forward dominance that was as tight as a drum, through concerted drives from the line-out, rucks and mauls, based around their brutal willingness to stampede anything in their way.

But they met an Irish eight who were devilish in their defence and who refused to take a backward step in the loose. The Irish were supercharged and desperate.

Gloucester were also penalised constantly up front. They were unable to challenge in the line-out and use their power in the scrum and frankly, the referee officiated the forward exchanges like a man who had no clear idea about how the contest was developing among the forwards.

The constant, fractious whistle fragmented the game, and although Gloucester opened with a bludgeoning first quarter, in which Adam Eustace grew into the match, the much-vaunted shoot-out between Ludovic Mercier and Barry Everitt was developing into a one-sided battle.

While Everitt kicked five out of his first six, including the conversion of the game's only try from James Cockle, Mercier missed with five successive penalties, although two seemed to cruise straight between the uprights but were not awarded.

Gloucester have serious trouble in switching the intensity and weight of attacks. If Mercier misses with his boot, and to be totally fair, it was the first time this season his left foot has not paid dividends, Gloucester cannot shift a game on its axis.

The outside backs did not touch the ball in a constructed move until the 17th minute which meant it was very difficult to alter the nature or tempo of the play.

They also infected their pattern with chronic ill-discipline and that was at the root of the Irish advance.

The Irish, although committed and feverish in contact, simply preyed on Gloucester mistakes and it cost Gloucester points.

Their try came when Junior Paramore's intended pick up and delivery to Dimitri Yachvili from the base of the scrum was intercepted by Darren Edwards, and although Chris Catling got back to make a splendid tackle on Paul Sackey, Gloucester never recovered.

Gloucester won a scrum close to their line, Yachvili was snagged by Edwards and his pass slithered over the try line before Catling could reach the horribly spinning ball and Cockle pounced to score.

Gloucester's discipline evaporated and they looked a shell-shocked side who disappeared down the tunnel at half-time.

But the game changed astonishingly after the break. Galvanised by a new-found spirit, Gloucester grabbed the match by the scruff of the neck and proceeded to dominate possession and territory through the concerted efforts of the forwards, particularly Eustace, Trevor Woodman and pick-pocketing Rob Fidler in the line-out.

They learned that the blueprint for success was in keeping their cool and discipline and they turned a first-half penalty count of 16-6 in the Irish favour into a 12-2 second period stranglehold.

Mercier suddenly found his range, striking four penalties in 19 minutes, and a fifth with eight minutes remaining, but still there would be no salvation.

They should have scored but lost the ball too quickly in contact or either kicked away possession – once when they had a four-on-one advantage. They were simple but crucial mistakes. There was little dexterity or composure in the final, splintered moments.

When Gloucester needed a tiny piece of invention, they were engulfed with panic.

This was another game that slipped agonisingly away.

LONDON IRISH: M. Horak; J. Bishop, G. Appleford, R. Hoadley, P. Sackey; B. Everitt, D. Edwards (H. Martens, 67); N. Hatley (M. Worsley, 46), R. Kirke (N. Drotske, 46), R. Hardwick (S. Halford, 46), R. Strudwick (capt.), S. Williams, J. Cockle, D. Danaher, C. Sheasby (R. Bates, 43).

GLOUCESTER: C. Catling (J. Goodridge 40); D. O'Leary (T. Fanolua, 71), J. Ewens, R. Todd (capt.), J. Frape; L. Mercier, D. Yachvili; T. Woodman, O. Azam (C. Fortey, 40), P. Collazo (F. Pucciariello, 40), R. Fidler, E. Pearce, A. Eustace, A. Hazell, J. Paramore (F. Pucciariello, 14-26; J. Boer, 64).

REFEREE: Ian Rammage (SRU).

STAR MAN: Adam Eustace.

JC