

THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2001

PACK POWER SEES THE WASPS DEMOLISHED

SAINT-ANDRE ENJOYING AN EARLY CHRISTMAS AFTER HIS SIDE
ROMP TO VICTORY

GLOUCESTER 43 WASPS 13

As Nigel Melville, head bowed, left the after match press conference, Philippe Saint-Andre wished him an early Merry Christmas.

'I'll send a card,' said Melville in reply, and 'I will bring the chocolates' Saint-Andre added.

The sweetness of this victory was not lost on the Gloucester director of rugby.

This was another raucous, raw night of Kingsholm pyrotechnics, a brutal endorsement of their forward vitality, a ceaseless, charging momentum that cut Wasps to ribbons.

A volatile mixture of raw-boned power and control catapulted Gloucester to their four-try success and blasted them back to fourth in the table.

Their dynamism was provided by their multi-faceted hooker, the incendiary Olivier Azam, who scored two tries, both containing an astonishing amount of power and energy.

"He was hungry to play well," said Saint-Andre. "He has power, strength – everything, and his two tries were unbelievable."

What you substitute for Azam's belligerence, you slightly lose in the mechanics, but Gloucester were able to survive a shaky first-half line-out, because their overall control was so great.

They found there was no replacement for taking the ball forward in the tight and subsequently, Wasps lost their stomach for the fight.

Azam's first try came when he blasted away from the side of a maul, kicking like a mule, thundered into Phil Greening, butted the post for good measure and scored.

He rose like Rocky from the debris with Kingsholm in raptures.

Gloucester's base was indelibly set by the front five, but Andy Gomarsall showed his advancement with a sprightly, hard working performance that even earned a hug from Saint-Andre, while Ludovic Mercier dropped his ammunition on the Wasps defence and had them in disarray. He also collected 15 points.

"I was very pleased with the whole of my team because they have shown an appetite to work really hard and this was a brilliant result," Saint-Andre said.

"All the players I put on as impact players did a great job and we kept the ball much better."

Gloucester probably had more control against Newcastle, but there they panicked. Here, they regrouped and simply went again, keeping the ball and keeping their composure.

Andy Hazell got the better of Paul Volley, to the delight of the Gloucester man. How he loved it. He was at the heart of the second try when he skipped through Volley's tackle and set Gloucester away with an arching run.

Terry Fanolua and Henry Paul fed Daren O'Leary on the right and when Gloucester won a penalty, well, there was only one thing for it.

Azam ploughed forward, this time taking only half of the Wasps pack over the line with him for their second score.

It was a game breaking try because it confirmed Wasps did not have the strength or will to compete with Gloucester in the tight.

Gloucester's control wavered slightly after the break and Wasps hit back with a try for Stuart Abbott to score after good work from Will Green and Simon Shaw. It cut Gloucester's advantage to 10 points, but there was still time for two more scores.

After Todd, excellent again at full-back, had been disallowed because of Diego Albanese's decoy run, and Mark Cornwell, superb as a replacement, had been called back for a forward pass, Gloucester finally struck.

It was a score that confirmed Saint-Andre's believe in his replacement strategy. James Simpson-Daniel swapped passes with Henry Paul before chasing his kick. Matthew Leek was stranded by Simpson-Daniel's tackle and Jake Boer wrestled possession away to score.

Their bonus point came when Ian Jones of all people deliberately knocked on beneath the posts and the referee awarded a penalty try.

It completed Gloucester's mighty effort. Now can they do it away.

"I told all of the guys that as soon as they lost their discipline, they would be off – even if it was after five minutes," Saint-Andre said.

"Two and a half years ago we lost away to Bedford and West Hartlepool. This is the improvement my squad have made and it has been a lot of pressure for me.

"But I am behind this squad and believe it can be one of the best in Europe."

GLOUCESTER: R. Todd; D. O'Leary, T. Fanolua, H. Paul, D. Albanese (J. Simpson-Daniel 67); L. Mercier, A. Gomarsall; P. Collazo (T. Woodman 49), O. Azam (C. Fortey 49), F. Pucciariello, R. Fidler, R. Pearce (M. Cornwell), A. Eustace, A. Hazell (J. Forrester 74), J. Boer (captain).

Reps. not used: D. Yachvili, J. Goodridge.

WASPS: M. Leek; S. Roiser, F. Waters (S. Abbott 38), M. Denney (captain), K. Logan (M. Offiah 71); A. King, M. Wood; C. Dowd, P. Greening (T. Leota 68), W. Green (M. Friday 71), S. Shaw, I. Jones, R. Jenkins (J. Beardshaw 68), P. Volley (C. Allen 70), M. Lock.

Reps.: M. Friday, S. Abbott, M. Offiah, C. Allen, J. Beardshaw, A. McKenzie, T. Leota.

REFEREE: D. Pearson.

STAR MAN: Olivier Azam.

ATTENDANCE: 10,171

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