

# THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2001

## ANOTHER HORROR SHOW FOR GLOUCESTER AT BATH CHERRY AND WHITES THROW AWAY THEIR BEST CHANCE TO WIN AT THE REC

BATH 12 GLOUCESTER 9

Another tale of what might have been for Gloucester. Their Rec. horror-run continues and their away-day nightmare goes on after a faltering performance at Bath.

Matt Perry kicked nine points and Iain Balshaw dropped a goal as Gloucester failed to collect their first league win at the Rec., following a sloppy and disjointed display. And they will never have a better chance. This was Gloucester's fourth away defeat, all by less than a score, and they can only have themselves to blame for not ending their jinx.

Despite defending and tackling bravely, Gloucester showed little imagination behind the scrum and saw another golden chance to hit Leicester's lead evaporate.

Gloucester arrived with the best attacking record in the Premiership, but the descent into Bath holds its own nightmares for the Cherry and Whites, and they began in uncertain style.

It was a typically raw day and a sell-out crowd saw Bath take the lead after four minutes.

Diego Albanese knocked on from a high kick, before Gavin Thomas made good his escape from the back of the scrum. Gloucester were penalised for coming in from the side of the ruck and Matt Perry kicked Bath ahead.

Gloucester's cohesion was rickety and ball retention not as tight as they would have liked.

Bath, desperate for victories themselves, pummelled Gloucester from the outset, running straight and recycling possession quickly.

Asked to tackle for their lives, Gloucester did so, but as the half wore on, Gloucester were being out-Gloucestered.

Bath controlled the line-outs, despite an early steal from Mark Cornwell, and were tight in the scrums. Saint-Andre's men struggled for a foot-hold.

They drew level when Andy Gomarsall tapped a free-kick to Phil Vickery before taking the return pass and Ludovic Mercier dropped the goal.

A second Perry penalty took Bath further ahead and despite splendid tackling from Vickery and Andy Hazell, Gloucester kicked away far too much possession to ever make an impact.

The times they did keep the ball in hand, Hazell made a splendid break through midfield, as did Henry Paul, but support was lacking and Gloucester coughed up the ball.

In contrast, Mike Catt delivered some wonderful possession for Bath who always seemed intent on recycling and swung attacks from left to right.

Gloucester were predictably one-paced and found pouring gas into their game almost impossible. But, for all that, they tackled relentlessly and their defence, for the most part, had been outstanding.

They lost Rob Fidler with 10 minutes of the period to go to be replaced by Ed Pearce, but mistakes frustrated Gloucester and simply littered their game.

It allowed Bath to go further ahead five minutes before the break when Gareth Cooper sped away from the back of a scrum, and although Gloucester prevented the try, Iain Balshaw dropped a goal.

Half-time: Bath 9, Gloucester 3.

Gloucester had worked hard, but had no-one of Catt's craft to shift the axis of play in one move. But they reduced the deficit when they drove a line-out deep into Bath's territory after a catch from Junior Paramore and, when play came infield, Mercier dropped a goal.

However, that was as good as it got for Gloucester in the third quarter as Bath strangled control of the game. They cut off Gloucester's ball supply from the line-out where Danny Grewcock had a towering match and they were tighter than Gloucester when they had the ball.

This was a crucial stage of the match because the Cherry and Whites only trailed by three points and if they could weather the Bath onslaught, had a chance of stealing the match, but to do that they had to be more creative with the ball in hand. They were simply asking for trouble inviting Bath on to them for such long periods.

Jake Boer was having a splendidly committed match, despite suffering a sickening blow to the side of his head. But despite Gloucester's best efforts, they simply could not manipulate enough of the ball to make an impact.

It was a hard working and diligent Bath effort, particularly up front where they had managed to match Gloucester in crucial areas and in productive parts of the field.

Bath's pressure only yielded a Perry penalty from wide on the right to stretch their advantage to 12-6 as the sands of time began to trickle down on Gloucester's hopes.

It was developing into another away-day disaster for Saint-Andre's men but a Mercier penalty, from right on the half-way line, brought Gloucester to within three points and set up a frantic finish.

Paul knocked on his own chip and chase before a frantic finale. Catt's high kick was fielded by Todd and he set Albanese away on [a] frantic dash for the line. He beat his first man but kicked away possession and although Gloucester secured the line-out, Paul clattered into midfield, only to be dragged down.

But Gloucester discovered playing in injury time was too late and the Cherry and Whites summed up their day when they lost a line-out – an area which had been a disaster throughout the match – on their own throw and when Catt's kick went dead, Gloucester were beaten.

BATH: M. Perry; I. Balshaw, K. Maggs, M. Tindall, T. Voyce; M. Catt (capt.), G. Cooper; D. Barnes, M. Regan, J. Mallett, S. Borthwick, D. Grewcock, G. Thomas, J. Scaysbrook, M. Gaby.

Reps.: A. Williams, A. Long, A. Hopcroft, O. Berkeley, S. Daniell, J. El-Abd, A. Beattie.

GLOUCESTER: R. Todd; D. O'Leary, J. Ewens, H. Paul, D. Albanese; L. Mercier, A. Gomarsall; P. Collazo, C. Fortey, P. Vickery (capt.), R. Fidler, M. Cornwell, J. Boer, A. Hazell, J. Paramore.

Reps.: D. Yachvili, J. Simpson-Daniel, T. Fanolua, F. Pucciariello, T. Woodman, A. Eustace, E. Pearce.

REFEREE: Steve Lander (RFU).

STAR MAN: Phil Vickery.