

THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2001

GLOUCESTER WIN VIOLENT GAME WITH NEWCASTLE

THREE FINE TRIES AND TWO MASSIVE FIGHTS
AS CHERRY AND WHITES TRIUMPH

GLOUCESTER 29 NEWCASTLE 25

Gloucester won an astonishing Premiership match at Kingsholm that was marred by two huge punch-ups and Olivier Azam's sending off for fighting with Epi Taione who was also dismissed.

It discoloured a wonderful game of rugby in which the Cherry and Whites nailed three excellent tries through Adam Eustace, Daren O'Leary and Terry Fanolua to go second in the Premiership.

Gloucester were cruising to victory before three Falcons' tries, the last from Jonny Wilkinson sparked a frantic finish.

It was as ugly as it got at Kingsholm. A sickening bout of general mayhem coloured the air for the first 20 minutes as almost every player was involved in two huge, bloody and raw brawls.

Rarely can Kingsholm have witnessed such a nasty, free flowing exhibition of violence as they saw here.

The second ended with the dismissals of Gloucester's Olivier Azam and Epi Taione of Newcastle for a fight that spilled into the dug-outs and had the replacements involved. Azam left the field with blood pouring from his nose, and Taione having taken an age to move from the Gloucester bench.

It started when Phil Vickery and Stuart Grimes threw a barrage of blows, before almost every player singled a man and piled in.

It made the first outbreak of violence seem like a tea party when Jake Boer and Micky Ward traded blows as a scrum disrupted.

The signs were there then that the undercurrent was bloody, but who to blame in those dark forward recesses is impossible to dissect. The fighting over-shadowed a period when Henry Paul missed an early penalty for Gloucester before Jonny Wilkinson struck the Falcons ahead when Gloucester were penalised for pushing too early at the scrum.

The disruption hurt Gloucester more initially. They spilled a lot of ball and could not disrupt Newcastle at their source of possession.

But gradually the Cherry and Whites, led by a riveting effort from Vickery, established control. The forwards worked ferociously hard and began to turn the screw. They dominated territory and possession but faltered slightly out wide where Terry Fanolua was penalised for a forward pass that put Mark Cornwell away.

But the tide was turning and the 11,000 crowd were on their feet after 24 minutes. The pace was frenetic and unforgiving, but it was Gloucester who snatched the first try.

It came from a Newcastle throw that was stolen by Adam Eustace, who headed for the line to be driven over by his pack for the score. You might win the odd game at Kingsholm, but not many fights. Paul converted and Gloucester were ahead 7-3.

They continued to dominate with Trevor Woodman, Jake Boer and Cornwell all getting through a tremendous amount of work. It was ragged, but splendidly committed and Gloucester continued to dominate the remainder of the half without being able to extend Newcastle. All they had to show for it was a Paul penalty, before Wilkinson slashed the deficit with three points of his own.

Half-time: Gloucester 10, Newcastle 6.

Gloucester began the second period with a Paul penalty before snatching their second try and what a beauty it was.

O'Leary started it when he received possession and chipped over Newcastle's defence.

Weir spilled possession in the turnover, before Diego Albanese and Woodman, having a terrific match, made excellent bursts down the left, creating space on the opposite wing. Paul received the ball and thumped a cross-field kick into the hands of Hazell, who in turn found O'Leary on an angled break to score.

It was a brilliant score and six minutes later they were in again. Albanese, sprightly and dangerous, created it, alongside another charging burst from Woodman.

The little Argentine drew the cover and sent Fanolua hurtling over in the far right corner.

That should have sewn the game up for Gloucester, but it was Saint-Andre's decision to replace Woodman and Eustace that took all the power and intensity from Gloucester's sails.

Firstly, Jamie Noon finished off a snapping break from Inga Tuigamala and Wilkinson's flipped pass, before Newcastle were awarded a penalty try following a collapsed line-out move. Gloucester's advantage had been cut from 23-6 to 26-18 with 15 minutes remaining.

It was all beginning to unravel for Gloucester in a thrilling finish. They lost a lot of field position as Paul particularly kicked away badly, allowing Newcastle to attack. Suddenly, Gloucester's advantage had disappeared and it looked bleak when Wilkinson scored Newcastle's third try.

It was a splendid effort after he collected Ian Peel's long floated pass after several phases of possession.

From nowhere, Gloucester were in serious danger of losing and it needed a 79th minute penalty from Paul to calm the nerves and extend Gloucester's advantage.

Newcastle attacked furiously in the last minutes, but the Cherry and Whites held firm to collect a crucial if tarnished home victory.

Northampton's victory over London Irish catapulted Saint-Andre's men into second in the Premiership following this latest home victory, but the bad blood, and there was plenty of it, is set to run and run.

GLOUCESTER: D. O'Leary; J. Ewens, T. Fanolua, R. Todd, D. Albanese; H. Paul, D. Yachvili; T. Woodman, O. Azam, P. Vickery (capt.), A. Eustace, M. Cornwell, J. Forrester, A. Hazell, J. Boer.
Reps.: A. Gomarsall, J. Simpson-Daniel, P. Collazo, R. Fidler, F. Pucciariello, C. Fortey, J. Paramore.

NEWCASTLE: D. Walder; G. McClure, J. Noon, T. May, M. Stephenson; J. Wilkinson (capt.), H. Charlton; M. Ward, N. Makin, G. Graham, D. Weir, S. Grimes, E. Taione, R. Arnold, J. Dunbar.
Reps.: G. Armstrong, I. Tuigamala, I. Peel, B. Balshen, M. Hurter, P. Lam, H. V. M. Hunter, H. Vyvyan.

REFEREE: R. Maybank (London).

STAR MAN: Adam Eustace.

JC