

# THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, JANUARY 26, 2002

GLOUCESTER WIN PLACE IN SHIELD SEMI'S AFTER A GREAT  
SECOND-HALF DISPLAY

GOMARSALL SHINES IN DREADFUL CONDITIONS

GLOUCESTER 46 EBBW VALE 11

GLOUCESTER: D. O'Leary; J. Simpson-Daniel, T. Fanolua, R. Todd, D. Albanese; L. Mercier, A. Gomarsall; P. Collazo, C. Fortey, F. Pucciariello, M. Cornwell, A. Eustace, J. Boer (capt.), A. Hazell, J. Paramore.

Reps.: D. Yachvili, H. Paul, M. Garvey, J. Forrester, A. Deacon, M. Irish, R. Fidler.

EBBW VALE: M. James; A. Takarangi, R. Shorney, P. Matthews, A. Wagstaff; G. Cull, K. Ellis; I. Thomas, L. Phillips, M. Jones, C. Bilen (capt.), N. Edwards, K. Tuipolotu, P. Williams, W. Thomas.

Reps.: D. Penisini, J. Evans, O. Booyse, R. Williams, D. Weatherley, A. Bevan, R. Watts.

REFEREE: M. De Santis (Italy).

STAR MAN: Andy Gomarsall.

A rather tasty European tie this, which eventually went the way of Gloucester in saturating conditions at Kingsholm.

Rarely can the great old ground have been pummelled by such elements. The rain swept in and the wind billowed to create astonishingly difficult conditions.

In the circumstances it was highly commendable Gloucester produced the second half showing they did to score four excellent tries and surge, rather than slither, into the last four of the Parker Pen Shield.

Inspiration in the murk and gloom was provided by that willing maverick Andy Gomarsall.

He revelled in the challenge at the base of Gloucester's scrum to look back near something like his sniping best. It was a heart-warming performance.

He came into his own when Gloucester's forwards finally found their footing, particularly around the fringes in the second period. There is no substitute for power and persistence.

Gomarsall created two of the four tries, firstly chipping superbly over a square defence for Daren O'Leary to score and secondly using O'Leary's decoy run to send James Simpson-Daniel scurrying away down the blindside for the crucial second try. Both were beautifully worked.

That sealed the game for Gloucester after they had lost Adam Eustace as early as the 10th minute when he was carried off with a leg injury following a collapsed line-out.

Philippe Saint-Andre revealed afterwards Eustace had broken the Fibula in his left leg and would miss the rest of the season.

"This is vey bad news because Adam will be out for the rest of the season." he said. "It is a big, big blow because Adam has been outstanding this season and has been our best line-out forward.

"It is a great shame for him because he was playing as well as ever and would have played for England A next weekend."

Eustace underwent an operation on Friday night at Gloucestershire Royal Hospital and is expected to be out of action for six months.

When Gloucester also lost Federico Pucciariello with a groin problem, Ebbw Vale's confidence and belief grew, because they had not been in the game in the opening quarter.

They were determined and tough and gave it a right go in the scrums and line-out where Gloucester fell foul of the referee.

In such horrendous conditions and against the wind, Saint-Andre was not concerned by their deficit at half-time after Kevin Ellis' kick was missed by both O'Leary and Simpson-Daniel and Andrew Wagstaff followed in to score for an 11-9 advantage.

It gave Vale a two-point interval lead and crucially a try, but Gloucester dramatically found a remedy for their inconsistency.

It was Gomarsall who provided it with an injection of belief and pace and now the pack warmed to the task.

There was no let up in the drive or determination but such were the appalling conditions, splitting the Kingsholm eight is impossible.

They tackled when they had to and drove close and tight. It enabled Ludovic Mercier, back at number 10, to produce a near faultless display of goal-kicking.

Given the circumstances his 28 points was nothing short of miraculous.

Near the end there were charging tries for the skipper Jake Boer, when he came round the near side to collect a Rob Fidler touch-down and surge in to score, and at the end when James Forrester wriggled delightedly over to seal the match.

What would a game be without a try from him these days?

Gloucester won the match where it will please them, in the final quarter and with the power of the forwards and Mercier's deadly boot doing the damage alongside Gomarsall's display.

"I was not worried at half-time because I told the players not to panic, do the simple things well and we will win the game," Saint-Andre said.

"Ebbw Vale were strong in the scrum and line-out and drove well, but it was almost impossible to play good rugby in such poor conditions.

"I am pleased to get into the semi-finals because we said at the start of the season that the Shield was a competition we could win.

"Two and a half years ago this game would have been close, but we can win well now."

JC