

THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2002

SAINT-ANDRE FINISHES WITH A WIN AT QUINS
CHERRY AND WHITES MAKE SURE PHILIPPE IS GIVEN
A PERFECT SEND OFF

HARLEQUINS 6 GLOUCESTER 18

There was a perfect symmetrical end for Philippe Saint-Andre at The Stoop as his final match in charge of Gloucester ended with his 69th victory in all matches – the same number as French caps he won.

Saint-Andre bowed out in style with a crucial Gloucester victory as he was draped in a Cherry and White scarf as supporters invaded the pitch to celebrate the success that was cemented by tries from Diego Albanese and Olivier Azam.

He was joined by the rest of the squad who were acclaimed by the masses of fans.

It was a massive victory for Gloucester and a fitting send-off to the former French skipper as the fans chanted 'Saint-Andre, Saint-Andre' in front of the dug out. There were tears, some of joy, some of sadness as his ovation lasted and lasted.

Sympathy, as well as heart-felt thanks, mushroomed into the London air – the Kingsholm chief visibly moved to tears after saying a very special goodbye. He was forced back to the bench with a pair of dark glasses to hide the evidence.

Gloucester had pin-pointed their two matches as crucial for their Heineken Cup hopes, but they made an unsteady start.

Both Ludovic Mercier and Paul Burke missed early penalties, in a frantic, disjointed opening that neither team dominated. There was plenty of committed hard work from Phil Vickery and Olivier Azam, but the steaming intent was taken out of Gloucester's play by Quins, who stole ahead after 14 minutes when a splendid line-out drive was hauled down by Gloucester and Burke landed the penalty.

Gloucester hit back immediately when Mercier curled home a penalty from wide on the left after[*sic*].

Harlequins then went in front again when Burke landed his second penalty.

Gloucester broke free with a wonderful try. Jake Boer made the first clattering charge to break the gain-line, and then James Forrester, all energy and wriggling intent, cut a further path through the retreating defence. Andy Gomarsall fed possession out to Henry Paul who drove forward before slipping a lovely little pass to Diego Albanese, who scored in the far corner to send the legions dressed in Cherry and White crazy.

It breathed life into Gloucester. Suddenly, they were making ground every time they hit Quins territory, but they could not come away with a second score.

Albanese made 15 metres from a standing start to emphasise their superiority, while Vickery, Boer and Junior Paramore made big strides.

Gloucester looked to have scored again when a line-out five metres out was held by Mark Cornwell and Azam collected possession to be driven over, but the try was not given because the he[*sic*] had been held up.

Vickery then got himself involved with England team-mate Will Greenwood, who tackled Gomarsall late and that took the steam out of Gloucester.

They ended the half when Federico Pucciariello was sinbinned for stamping, but from the penalty, in injury time, Burke dragged his kick to the left of the posts.

Half-time: Harlequins 6, Gloucester 8.

The opening to the second period was crucial because with only a two point advantage, Gloucester were desperate to close the game off.

It was percentage rugby played with far more control and bite than Quins. They made fewer mistakes and dominated in areas where they knew they could win the game – in the tight at ruck and maul and in the scrum, where even Gloucester's seven men seriously punished Quins at every set phase.

Openings were few and far between, but they looked like they might come Gloucester's way. It almost did when Gomarsall and Mercier fed Paul who put Fanolua away down the left, but Quins recovered and made their tackles.

Harlequins take some bashing up front, but Gloucester were doing the bashing. It was tough and committed, but Forrester was inspired, as was Vickery, in leading from the front.

They got the try that surely won them the match when Nick Duncombe's pass was intercepted by Mercier, who did not have the pace to make the line.

Ben Gollings got back to make a fine tackle, but Mercier off-loaded in to Fanolua. He was also held, but Azam came steaming up to take the pass and burst over to score.

It was not the prettiest try, but in the context of the season, crucial. Mercier converted and Gloucester were 15-6 ahead.

Gloucester stretched their lead when Mercier landed another monster penalty from the half-way line as Saint-Andre made a raft of replacements.

It had taken until the final 10 minutes for Quins to emerge from their shells. Greenwood finally sparked into a semblance of life in midfield. Gollings also had a run, but Harlequins had been woefully short of what it took to win the game.

Gloucester could thank the unerring application of their forward unit and some good defence, particularly in midfield where they tackled well.

Nothing was seen of Luger or David Slemen as an attacking force. Gloucester had simply looked the more organised side.

HARLEQUINS: D. Slemen; B. Gollings, W. Greenwood, N. Burrows, D. Luger; P. Burke, N. Duncombe; J. Leonard, A. Tiatia, J. Dawson, G. Morgan (capt.), A. Codling, S. White-Cooper, P. Sanderson, T. Diprose.

Reps.: J. Roddam, A. Olver, L. Sherriff, R. Winters, S. Bernard, C. Bell, R. Jewell.

GLOUCESTER: D. O'Leary; T. Fanolua, H. Paul, R. Todd, D. Albanese; L. Mercier, A. Gomarsall; F. Pucciariello, O. Azam, P. Vickery (capt.), R. Fidler, M. Cornwell, J. Boer, J. Forrester, J. Paramore.

Reps.: D. Yachvili, J. Simpson-Daniel, J. Ewens, C. Fortey, P. Collazo, P. Caillet, E. Pearce.

REFEREE: D. Pearson (RFU).

STAR MAN: James Forrester.