

THE CITIZEN

MONDAY, APRIL 22, 2002

GLOUCESTER PICK UP PRICELESS WIN

BRISTOL 40 GLOUCESTER 41

Just when they needed it most, Gloucester breathed life into their campaign with a priceless victory that may finally ignite the blue touch paper smouldering under Nigel Melville.

Guided along throughout by their director of rugby, who was vociferous in his support on the sideline, Gloucester emerged from this latest bout of M5 mayhem with a one-point victory that was far more commanding than the scoreline suggested.

What it does is provide a platform – a base on which Melville and his coaching duo of Paul Turner and Ian Smith can work.

The key to it was the remarkable restraint and composure Gloucester displayed. The discipline was superb.

They were calm but focused mentally – it was a huge improvement on two impoverished displays.

They needed some heroes after crushing defeats at Wasps and Northampton and leading the charge was a monumental effort from Junior Paramore.

In what was perhaps one of the best back row displays of the season, Paramore was brutal in the loose and savage in defence. It was a display brimming with authority and drive.

He was rewarded with two tries – capitalising on Gloucester's crushing superiority in the scrum, where the front row were massive in their dominance.

Ed Pearce, who probably had one of his best games for the club in the second row, joined Paramore in the effort.

There was a sense of wanting to play for each other and, led by a sterling effort from Phil Vickery, who was injured in the very first minute, Gloucester's extra power proved crucial.

James Forrester and Koli Sewabu were equally as authoritative, while Terry Fanolua – the huge-hearted centre – crashed his frame into everything with no regard for his personal safety. It was tremendous.

They returned back to second in the Premiership and can now put the league to bed as they prepare for their Parker Pen Shield semi-final against Sale on Sunday.

Gloucester's first try came after 20 minutes when Pearce collected a second short range line-out and a thumping drive created the try for Sewabu.

But there were glimpses of more than just bump and grind. James Simpson-Daniel showed some dextrous touches and Forrester was leggy and hard to stop.

But Gloucester's advantage fell apart in four crazy minutes.

Firstly, Agustin Pichot's pass smashed into David Rees's chest in midfield and ballooned forward.

With Gloucester's defence sucked under the ball and perhaps expecting a knock-on, Lee Best scooped up the ball and scored at a canter beneath the posts.

That tied the scores before Gloucester gifted Bristol a second try. Andy Gomarsall looked to set Tom Beim away down the left, but Felipe Contepomi intercepted and beat Chris Catling to the corner.

It was imperative Gloucester stung back because they had played the majority of the rugby but found themselves behind.

Vickery was at the source when he straightened a powerful forward surge and Gomarsall atoned for his earlier error when he pounced to score.

Ludovic Mercier and Contepomi exchanged penalties before the break to leave Bristol two points ahead at 20-18.

Gloucester did not have to force the issue. With the wind and the superiority in the forwards in their favour, enough ball arrived for Gloucester to emerge even more convincing winners.

There was no let up in the points spree or the paucity of either defence.

Jamie Williams got over on the left after Gloucester ran out of defenders following Tim Payne's short pass as Bristol threatened to take charge.

But it was then that Gloucester's force came into its own.

Gomarsall was involved twice in a well directed move that also carried with it the weight of a Paramore charge before Fanolua crashed into midfield and Vickery smashed over from short range to score.

Five minutes later, Gloucester were over again. Catling arched a wonderful kick deep into the corner to set up the score.

Gloucester poured the pressure on from the line-out and Pichot's pass was touched down behind his line by Phil Christophers.

From the scrum, Olivier Azam, Trevor Woodman and Vickery put the squeeze on and Paramore touched down from the drive. Brute force at its best.

There was to be no let up in the scoring and no let up in the intensity.

Contepomi struck Bristol ahead with a penalty before the lead changed hands for the fifth time when Paramore scored again with 10 minutes remaining.

The heavy-hitting Samoan charged from a scrum before Gomarsall sent Rob Fidler thumping into midfield.

When possession was recycled again, Paramore was on hand to thump his way over. Now it was a question of whether Gloucester could maintain their lead.

They did and also added to it. With the away support at fever pitch, Fidler's workrate and Gomarsall's pass allowed Mercier to drop a goal.

A second followed in the final minute to leave Bristol needing at least one try to save themselves.

They managed one when Christophers plunged over to the left of the posts and Contepomi's conversion took Bristol to within one point.

But it was to prove not enough and Gloucester held on for a crucial victory that said as much for their character as it did for their skill.

Azam and Mercier hurled their shirts into the crowd in celebration.

It had been one of those days for the Cherry and Whites and how they needed it. In the scheme of things, it was a massive result and a performance Gloucester can now work on.

BRISTOL: L. Best; D. Rees, J. Williams (L. Nabaro, 47), F. Contepomi, P. Christophers; S. Drahm (B. Daniel, 25), A. Pichot, P. Johnstone (Payne, 38), N. McCarthy (S. Nelson, 26), J. White, A. Sheridan (C. Morgan, 69), A. Brown, C. Short (J. Brownrigg, 55), _ . Lipman, B. Sturnham.

GLOUCESTER: C. Catling; D. O'Leary, J. Simpson-Daniel, T. Fanolua, T. Beim; L. Mercier, A. Gomarsall; T. Woodman (P. Collazo, 74), O. Azam (C. Fortey, 65), P. Vickery, E. Pearce (R. Fidler, 62), M. Cornwell, J. Forrester, K. Sewabu, J. Paramore.

REFEREE: T. Spreadbury (Bristol)[*sic*]

STAR MAN: Junior Paramore.

ATTENDANCE: 7,066

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