

# THE CITIZEN

MONDAY, JUNE 3, 2002

CLINICAL GLOUCESTER SHATTER SALE TO REACH TWICKENHAM

FORWARD POWER SETS UP ZURICH CHAMPIONSHIP

FINAL APPEARANCE AGAINST RIVALS BRISTOL

SALE 11 GLOUCESTER 33

Gloucester booked their place at Twickenham for the Zurich Premiership play-off final against Bristol but they achieved their goal in less than spectacular fashion.

In contrast to their convincing 60-9 victory over Newcastle Falcons, their win against Sale was more of a grafting affair.

It was not pretty stuff but the Gloucester pack quickly gained an ascendancy in the forwards from the opening exchanges.

Phil Vickery's men were always in control although there was a scare midway through the second half when Sale temporarily reduce the deficit with a Mark Cueto try.

But any chance of a Sale comeback were short-lived as Gloucester responded to their setback with two well-executed late tries to send the travelling Shed into jubilation.

Sale looked a sorry shadow of the side that finished second in the Zurich Premiership and also won the Parker Pen Shield.

They were completely outplayed in the scrums, particularly in the first half by a powerful Gloucester five.

Right from the kick-off the Manchester outfit were disrupted and were forced to make numerous changes to their personnel.

Scrum-half Brian Redpath and Alex Sanderson had to go off for treatment to facial injuries while Steve Hanley suffered a hamstring pull.

Gloucester hooker Olivier Azam may have been fortunate not to have been sinbinned for a crude tackle on fly-half Charlie Hodgson.

But overall it was a fine display by the visiting forwards and they were backed up well with a solid display from scrum-half Andy Gomarsall and some clinical kicking from stand-off Ludovic Mercier including a superb drop-goal.

Gloucester edged ahead when Sale were penalised for off-side at a ruck and Mercier, deadly throughout the afternoon with his boot, made no mistake with the penalty.

Mercier's kick dedication paid off as there was never a chance that he would miss any of his attempts at goal.

But the theme of the afternoon was the way the Sale forwards were destroyed and this was in evidence as Gloucester went over for their first try after 16 minutes.

Mercier intercepted for good possession, chipped ahead and was unlucky not to go over for a try. Patrice Collazo was then held up short.

Gomarsall then spread the ball to winger Tom Beim and Paul, and still Gloucester could not find a way forward. The ball was recycled and Gomarsall tried to feed lock Rob Fidler for a try but the pass was forward.

From the scrum on Sale's line openside Koli Sewabu nipped over for the try, which Mercier converted for a 10-0 lead to the visitors.

Hodgson put over a penalty after 18 minutes when Fanolua was penalised after making a tackle but Mercier regained the 10-point advantage when he slotted over a kick after 21 minutes awarded for handling in the ruck.

Hodgson missed his second penalty but Mercier showed a piece of brilliance which ended a spell of static play by Gloucester.

Paul suddenly switched by passing to Mercier and the fly-half produced a superb drop-goal with his left boot after 32 minutes.

Mercier slotted his third penalty five minutes before half-time to give Gloucester a seemingly comfortable 19-3 half-time lead.

Gloucester struggled to get going in the second half and Sale were allowed to claw their way back into the game. Hodgson added his second penalty when Gloucester were penalised for handling in the ruck but disaster struck for the visitors in the 63rd minute.

From a set-piece in their 22, Sale won possession and full-back Jason Robinson spotted a gap, chipped ahead and raced towards the ball. Robinson continued his sprint before passing to Sale's other speed merchant Cueto who sprinted over in the corner unopposed, but Hodgson was unable to convert.

Gloucester though, managed to recover from this setback with an opportunist try from Gomarsall in the 72nd minute after Boer won good turnover ball. Gomarsall spotted the gap and sprinted over to score between the posts; an effort which Mercier converted.

Sale were now making numerous errors and Beim pounced when he intercepted a poor pass by the backs and burst clear for a comfortable try after 75 minutes with Mercier converting.

It was a breathing space Gloucester needed as they booked their first Twickenham final for 12 years.

SALE: J. Robinson; S. Hanley (V. Going 29), M. Shaw, D. Harris (J. Baxendell 56), M. Cueto; C. Hodgson, B. Redpath (A. Dickens 19-26); K. Yates, A. Titterell (B. Jackman 67), S. Turner (B. Stewart 47), C. Jones, S. Lines, P. Anglesea (A. Perelini 74), A. Sanderson (A. Perelini 26-35), S. Pinkerton (R. Wilkes 67).

GLOUCESTER: H. Paul; D. O'Leary, T. Fanolua (C. Catling 64), R. Todd, T. Beim (C. Catling 48-57); L. Mercier, A. Gomarsall (D. Yachvili 80); P. Collazo (T. Woodman 59), O. Azam (C. Fortey 67), P. Vickery (A. Deacon 80), R. Fidler, R. Pearce (C. Gillies 70), J. Boer, K. Sewabu, J. Paramore (P. Caillet 67).

REFEREE: S. Lander (S. Leyshon 80).

STAR MAN: Andy Gomarsall.

JC