

THE CITIZEN

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VICKERY SO PROUD TO LEAD GLOUCESTER TO CUP TRIUMPH

FINAL GLORY FOR CHERRY AND WHITES AFTER A SEASON
OF IMMENSE DRAMA ON AND OFF THE FIELD

Still in his Cherry and White shirt and with his Zurich Championship medal hanging around his neck, Phil Vickery drank in the 'fantastic' feeling of becoming the Gloucester skipper to pilot the club to their first major glory in two decades.

The Kingsholm skipper emerged from a fierce Twickenham meltdown against Bristol delighted to have finally landed the Zurich play-off trophy and cap a physically and mentally gruelling campaign on the last day of its 11-month season.

He will leave on England's summer tour of Argentina today with Gloucester's emergence as real challengers to Leicester well and truly ignited under the guidance of coach Nigel Melville.

"We came here with a chance of winning a major trophy and we would do everything we could to do it," he said.

"We had to dog it out against Sale last week in the semi-final just to get here and we would have all been gutted to have walked off the pitch losers.

"But what this means to the players, the supporters and everybody involved with the club is just fantastic.

"I have played in matches where we have lost by 75 points to Harlequins, been hammered by Bath and lost semi-finals, but no-one can say we were lucky or we did not deserve it.

"We came here and beat them fair and square and that trophy is in our trophy cabinet. Nobody can take that away from us."

Vickery was part of a churning, ceaseless forward effort in an uncompromising duel between two packs of forwards who slugged themselves to a standstill during Gloucester's 28-23 victory.

But even after the whistle had blown, the stature of the new England skipper grew.

He allowed Andy Deacon, the giant of a Gloucester man, prop and genuine local hero, to help him lift the trophy. It was some gesture to the man who has been at the club for more than 15 seasons and who Vickery used to live with. He does not forget. The delight on Deacon's face said it all.

Both sides were understandably nervous, but the battling qualities shown by Vickery, Jake Boer and the rest of the Kingsholm pack, created the victory.

"There was a lot of nervous laughter on the bus," Vickery said.

"We were hyped up for it and one of the boys kept saying he had a vision of me lifting the trophy at the end.

"That was something I did not even think about, but I am so pleased because so many people worked so hard to achieve this.

"But don't forget this has been an up and down season for us. We had the Andy Keast thing at the start of the season, then Philippe Saint-Andre left and Melville came in but could not coach at the start.

"But at the start of the season I don't think we would have won this game – that is why winning was so important.

"People said we were favourites, but Bristol are a hell of a side. Anyone who can win at Leicester, no matter the competition, are a quality side.

"If we are going to challenge long-term we need to improve. I think we know that, but this is fantastic for the club."

JC