

THE CITIZEN

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VICTORY IS FITTING FINALE FOR AZAM

He will make his way towards a thumping date with the world champions this summer in the knowledge that his first piece of Gloucester silverware has been safely tucked away.

The trophy triumph completes a massive transformation for a man constantly under the microscope after one of the most intense seasons ever.

When the final whistle sounded at Twickenham, Olivier Azam leapt immediately onto skipper Phil Vickery following Gloucester's success over Bristol – the man he has constantly been alongside following a bruising season for one of the toughest men in the English game.

Azam will depart with the French national squad today as a Six Nations Grand Slam winner and a Zurich play-off champion and he insisted Gloucester's future can only get better after their first trophy triumph in two decades.

"This is good because I think Gloucester will finally get some credit," he said.

"The future certainly looks good.

"We had some new players in the squad at the start of the season and now we have to keep going to get even better.

"This is a huge thing for the club and I am so pleased for players like Andy Deacon who has just had his Testimonial but had never won a major award."

Azam was part of a controlled but strong forward effort at Twickenham that always had the slight edge over Bristol.

Gloucester were given a tough time in the line-outs and scrummage, but Azam and his Cherry warriors had enough in reserve after a gruelling season to claim the trophy.

The former Montferrand hooker has found himself constantly under scrutiny this term, but finally his rugby skills have been allowed to do the talking.

"I don't think we played too well against Bristol like we have in previous matches, but it has been a long season and people must now remember we are winners and that is the most important thing," he said.

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