

THE CITIZEN

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MELVILLE HOPES TRIUMPH WILL ACT AS SPRINGBOARD GLOUCESTER BOSS ADMITS HUGE RELIEF AS CHERRY AND WHITES BASK IN GLORY

It is probably impossible to measure just how much Saturday's nerve-shredding victory meant to Nigel Melville.

Still dripping with a mixture of champagne and water, the Gloucester director of rugby revelled in the special feeling of guiding the Cherry and Whites to their first major success for two decades.

But Melville went further – underlining the relentless, suffocating search for perfection that marks Gloucester out as a unique rugby city.

On a draining west country afternoon at England's headquarters, the former Wasps boss was clearly delighted at Gloucester's success that could now become their springboard towards the real challenge of catching the table-topping Leicester Tigers.

In replacing Philippe Saint-Andre, Melville has installed a zeal and mental toughness that has guided Gloucester to glory after a relentless season but the work has only just started for the new Kingsholm supremo.

"It is only when you get to live in it – to experience it for yourself every day – that you realise how important the rugby is to everybody," he said.

"The expectations and the passions are so high from so many people and that makes this so special.

"I have not experienced that before. Winning this competition is a huge relief for me and everyone at Gloucester."

Melville lives his rugby the same as anybody from Longlevens and Tredworth. It is a currency and universal language he dearly appreciates and understands. Roared on by the vast majority of the Twickenham crowd, Gloucester managed to get the better of Bristol after a full-on display that was not their most fluent of the season but probably their most rewarding.

"I am having a great time at Gloucester and this victory is so fantastic for me because of everybody involved," said Melville.

"It has been a long season and now it is great to come away with something."

With Thinus Delport and Peter Buxton already signed up for next season's assault on the Heineken Cup, Melville is looking towards the future. But there may not be many more signings arriving at Castle Grim over the summer as his squad start their four-week summer break today.

"The players on tour will come back a bit later, but the players will have four weeks off," he said.

"We have some good young players and it is about developing the talent of the ones we have that is important."

Melville is a players man – a man at ease with his squad and he relishes seeing them do well. It had been a long time since Gloucester were last at a Twickenham final.

Their win ensured a flood of relief, but the quest for bigger and even better things has already started at Kingsholm.