

OFFICIAL MATCHDAY PROGRAMME || 2016/17 SEASON || GLOUCESTER RUGBY



VERSUS NORTHAMPTON SAINTS

ISSUE 10 || AVIVA PREMIERSHIP RUGBY
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CAPTAIN'S CORNER

GREIG LAIDLAW



GOOD AFTERNOON, AND IT'S GREAT TO WELCOME YOU TO THE FIRST GAME OF 2017 AS WE HOST NORTHAMPTON SAINTS.

First of all, Happy New Year! From all of us in the squad we hope that all of our supporters had a super Festive period, didn't over indulge and aren't nursing too much of a sore head today because we need you shouting loud for us!

It's been a very busy time for us over the Christmas period, it always is! Despite the hectic schedule, it fortunately fell the right side of Christmas, so we were able to spend some really great time with our families and this definitely gave all of the squad a real boost.

On the pitch, however, we are sitting on the back of two losses, and for us this is a disappointing place to be. We travelled to two tricky away games with very high hopes, and unfortunately, have come up short.

I wasn't part of the squad that went to La Rochelle, as I was offered a week off following a busy Autumn international period, but one thing that the boys have been talking about is the huge support that we had over in France.

It was a unique trip as it was the first chartered flight where the supporters were able to mingle with the players on the trip, and although the result

wasn't so favourable, the feedback has been incredibly positive after a strong trip.

It only feels like yesterday, but only a few days ago, the trip to Twickenham is always a great experience for players, and we did so much to try and win the game but ultimately didn't quite get there.

There has obviously been a lot of media debate about refereeing decisions etc since the closing stages of the Quins game, but we know that we cannot leave the result in the hands of anyone else but ourselves. We lifted ourselves from a precarious position in the second half and had a number of opportunities to win the game, and but for an unlucky bounce of the ball at both ends of the pitch we could easily have done so.

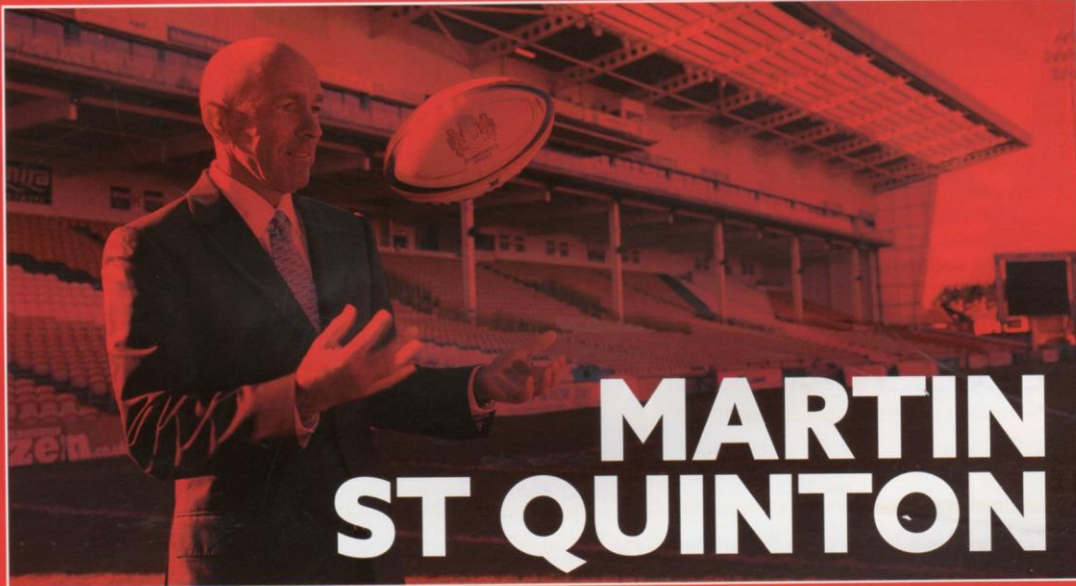
It's a very quick turnaround though, going into today's game against Northampton and this is a huge week for us with back to back games at Kingsholm.

With a turnaround like this, it's about focusing on the next game and getting the recovery spot on ahead of another big, physical test.

We have some great support staff around us at the club who will help the squad get in the best shape possible to take on today's test.

We have a big 2017 coming up, and we will be going full steam ahead to get to where we want to be, and once the ball begins to bounce our way, we'll be cooking!

Greig



MARTIN ST QUINTON

Good afternoon and a Happy New Year as we kick off 2017 with a home fixture this afternoon against Northampton Saints.

It seems like quite a while since we were last here at Kingsholm, when we took on La Rochelle, and it's good to be back at home after a couple of games on the road.

And, as the old saying about buses goes, you wait ages for one and then two come along, one after the other as we'll be back here at Kingsholm for what is always a keenly anticipated and hard-fought derby match against Worcester.

It's a key part of the season. The outcome of our three fixtures over the festive period, including Big Game 9 at Twickenham against Harlequins, will go a long way towards determining our Aviva Premiership destiny.

Today, being January 1st, also marks the first day that clubs can officially approach players at Aviva Premiership clubs who are out of contract at the end of the season with a view to opening contract talks.



Now, it won't have escaped your attention that, over the past couple of months, Gloucester Rugby has been mentioned in connection with all sorts of rumours in terms of players either on their way to or leaving the club.

The best possible advice I can offer is to only believe something when you read it in an official club press release!

There are all sorts of reasons why these rumours appear – it could be

an agent using the media to get the message out that his player does not have a contract offer from his current club and is therefore potentially available. Said agent could also use some carefully leaked words to start a bidding war for the services of his client.

One thing is certain, though - it seems that 'silly season' when it comes to transfer gossip seems to start earlier and earlier each year!

As a club, we have a firm policy of not commenting on any speculation and only make statements when the time is right for Gloucester Rugby, the relevant player and any other club involved.

We believe it's the correct way to conduct our business and would like to assure you, our supporters, that plenty of work is taking place behind the scenes to finalise the squad for next season and we will make our announcements at the appropriate time.

Enjoy the game.

Martin

HAPPY NEW YEAR AND
WELCOME BACK TO
KINGSHOLM TO KICK OFF
2017 WITH A HUGELY
IMPORTANT GAME AGAINST
NORTHAMPTON SAINTS.

I hope you all enjoyed a happy and festive Christmas period. In professional sport Christmas is always a busy time, and despite a 10 day gap between the European fixture in La Rochelle and Harlequins, we've been preparing for 3 massive games over a 12 day period.

The first of those on Tuesday night at Twickenham was another frustrating losing bonus point defeat but every point in this competition could prove vital at the end of the season. As always, we played some very good rugby and having fought our way back into the game, we were very disappointed with a couple of big decisions in the last couple of minutes.

With a five day turnaround into today's game, the main focus this week has been getting the players physical and mentally prepared for the challenge of Northampton. With a number of players returning from injury, we are fortunate to be able to rotate our squad over this period. It was great to see Jeremy Thrush and Andrew Symons returning over the past couple of games while Tom Marshall, Henry Trinder, Darren Dawidiuk and Henry Trinder are back in full training.

And in terms of the wider squad, we've been greatly encouraged by the development of a number of members of our Academy who are contributing greatly to our A League campaign as well as getting vital match experience on loan in the Championship. It shows that our development pathway is



working well and augurs well for the future.

After a really close game against Northampton at Franklins Gardens, we know this afternoon will be another tough physical battle and I'm sure you'll give Jim Mallinder and all the players and supporters of Northampton Saints their usual Kingsholm welcome.

Enjoy the game.

David

"With a five day turnaround into today's game, the main focus this week has been getting the players physical and mentally prepared for the challenge of Northampton."



VIEW FROM THE

GLOUCESTER Citizen

With half of Gloucester's season now gone, the best way to sum it up would be one of progress after a disappointing start - but with room for improvement.

Gloucester's early season struggles were characterised by an inability to hold onto leads and home woes but they are now turning the corner in both regards.

Three straight defeats at Kingsholm in the Aviva Premiership

were tough to swallow, particularly the manner of them - letting a 31-7 lead slip against Leicester, a poor display against a lesser fancied Newcastle outfit and a loss against arch-rivals Bath.

Whenever Gloucester have had success in the past, Castle Grim has been seen as a fortress and a tough place to go for any visiting team.

The thrilling comeback win over Saracens in the Anglo-Welsh Cup appears to have been a catalyst for

the transformation at home with Gloucester toppling both Wasps and French Top 14 high-flyers La Rochelle in spectacular fashion over recent weeks.

They are now on a roll at Kingsholm with five wins in a row and the mood around the place has completely changed, something they will be hoping to take into 2017, starting with Northampton today.

The win over Wasps was significant. Not only because it

was Gloucester's first on home turf in the Premiership against the second-placed side but also because it was a game in which they could and possibly would have crumbled earlier in the season.

Having led by just six points heading into the final few minutes, Gloucester not only withheld Wasps pressure to hang onto their lead but added a couple of late tries of their own to win 36-18.

And although Gloucester once again got into a winning position against Saracens, the fact that they pushed the defending Premiership and European champions all the way at Allianz Park was a further sign of their improvement.

The break from Premiership and European action during the Anglo-Welsh Cup gave the coaching staff a chance to iron out the fine margins that led to a number of narrow defeats and what has been apparent during recent weeks watching the team and in the media sessions is how the players are adapting to what they are being asked to do.

Tim Taylor said recently:

"The boys are trusting what we're doing and believing what we're doing.

"We're finding our feet with it, it's just sticking to it, buying into it and being positive with it and the biggest thing is everybody is on the same page, which is great to see."

Of course, there is still work to be done and some of the old concerns came creeping back in that poor first-half display against Bristol.

But the performance against La Rochelle at home showed that the win over Wasps was no flash in the pan and Gloucester are capable of beating some of the best sides, particularly at Kingsholm.

The squad depth has also been a pleasing factor with the likes



"Gloucester not only withheld Wasps pressure to hang onto their lead but added a couple of late tries of their own to win 36-18."

of Henry Purdy, Willi Heinz and Lewis Ludlow all stepping up when required, while lock Tom Denton, Jeremy Thrush and Andy Symons have all returned to fitness so the squad is looking stronger all the time.

If anyone thought the Cherry and Whites had cracked it by that point, they were in for a rude awakening as they were overpowered in the return fixture against La Rochelle.

Playing one of the best sides in the Top 14 away from home was always going to be a huge test and it provided a yardstick of what work Gloucester would have to do if they were to play and compete in the Champions Cup next season.

After a perfect start in the European Challenge Cup with a maximum 15 points taken from the first three games, Gloucester should still qualify but whether they finish first or second is no longer in their hands.

The two games against La Rochelle showed how crucial home advantage is likely to be in the knockout stages and if Gloucester

are going to have a good chance of winning the competition again you feel they have to claim bonus-point wins in the remaining pool games away to Treviso and at home to Bayonne to put the pressure on La Rochelle to win their final games well.

In terms of their current Premiership position Gloucester are probably still under-achieving but if they continue on an upward curve they should be on course for a top six finish – surely the top priority after missing out on the Champions Cup in recent seasons.

Gloucester face a battle to qualify for the Anglo-Welsh Cup semi-finals after starting with one win and one defeat – although the win over Saracens in that competition would rank as one of the highlights of the campaign so far.

So overall the half-term report would read:

Notable signs of improvement, providing hope for a successful second half of the season, but with plenty of work still to do.

GLOUCESTER RUGBY
HERITAGE

www.gloucester rugbyheritage.org.uk

GREAT PLAYERS FROM THE GLOUCESTER BACK ROW
PART 6THE EIGHTIES
TO NOUGHTIES

PAUL ASHMEAD

Paul Ashmead was a fast flanker, who knew how to score tries. In his Gloucester career he appeared 159 times, scoring 69 tries, a pretty good rate for a forward. Against Coventry in December 1994 he scored four tries, and for Gloucester United in October 1989 against Bedford Wanderers he scored six, all of them in the second half!

Paul Ashmead was born on 3 January 1966, in Gloucester, and attended Longlevens Secondary Modern School. He played for Gloucester Old Boys and Coney Hill, before making his first appearance for Gloucester on Boxing Day 1986 against Lydney.

All through his Gloucester career he had to compete for a back row place on either flank against John Gadd or Ian Smith and, in later years, Peter Glanville and Dave Sims appeared on the scene.

However, in 1991, following outstanding displays for Gloucester against England and Ireland in

successive weeks in World Cup warm up games, he was selected to play for the South West Division in games against London and the Midlands.

In May 1993 Paul was in the Gloucester team which won the inaugural Worthington National Tens competition played at Kingsholm. Gloucester won the cup, beating Harlequins 29-0 in the final, with Ashmead scoring a try.

Owing to the lack of first team opportunities, Paul decided to move to Rugby Lions in 1995, where he played a couple of seasons before an ankle injury ended his career.



IAN SMITH

Ian, son of the Cherry & White legend Dick Smith, was born on 16 March 1965, and educated at Sir Thomas Rich School.

Longlevens was his local club, from where he graduated to Kingsholm and made his first appearance as a replacement at Rosslyn Park on 15 September 1982. He had been

on the field for all of ten minutes before he was sent off for fighting! He must have learnt his lesson because he was never sent off again throughout his career.

He went on to make 336 appearances for Gloucester, scoring 55 tries. He was a speedy and dynamic open-side, who also gained 25 caps for Scotland.

Ian took some time to establish himself in the back-row because he had strong competition from Paul Wood and Mike Longstaff for the open-side berth but, by the 1984-85 season, he had made the position his own.

The 1989-90 season was a good one, and with just two games to play Gloucester contemplated a league and cup double. Ian was in the team which first lost to Nottingham to miss out on the league, and the following week was blown away by Bath in the Cup final. He captained Gloucester from 1991 to 1994.

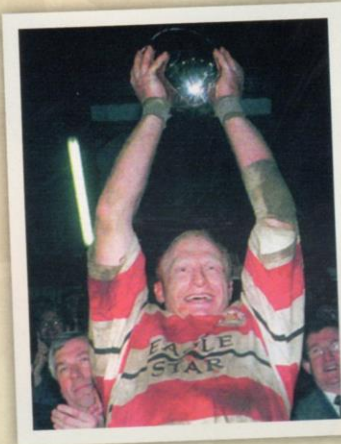
Early in his career Ian had aspirations to play for England and got as far as playing for England 'B' against Spanish Select in 1989. His opportunities were limited, however, and through a Scottish grandparent he qualified to play for Scotland.

In 1991 he played for Scotland 'B' against Ireland, and gained his first full cap against England in 1992. Further solid performances ensured a tour with Scotland to Australia that summer and two more caps.

He played in one game in the World Cup in 1995, toured New Zealand in the summer and played in both

tests. In the meantime he was more or less a permanent fixture for Scotland in the Home International Series in 1996 and 1997.

After Ian's playing career ended with Gloucester in 1996, he moved to Moseley for a couple of seasons. He then went into coaching, first at Newport then for a short spell back at Gloucester, before enjoying some success at Moseley, making much of limited resources. More recently he was Under 19 coach for the Georgian national team.



PETER GLANVILLE

Pete Glanville was a player who continually put his body on the line for the Club, and was much appreciated by the exacting Gloucester supporters. He was a blind side flanker, full of commitment and excellent at winning balls at the break-down.

Pete was born in Gloucester on 10 June 1971 and was yet another who played his early rugby for Longlevens. He was just over 20 years old when he made his debut for Gloucester against Stroud on the first day of the 1991-92 season.

The following season he became a regular in a team that found life difficult in the mid-nineties, sometimes flirting with relegation. In April 1996, Gloucester had to win the final game of the season to avoid the drop. It was a straight shoot-out for relegation between Gloucester and Saracens. Pete was in the team which won 17-10. A

couple of weeks later it was decided that there would be no relegation that season, as the league was to be extended!

So high was the regard in which Pete was held, he was made captain for the 1997-98 season, and he led Gloucester to victory in the final of the Cheltenham & Gloucester Cup against Bedford.

The latter days of his career were marred by injury and Pete played his last game against Orrell on 29 January 2000. He had made 147 appearances and scored 21 tries.

He went on to be Team Manager at Cinderford, guiding them to National League 1 status, only two levels below Gloucester.



JUNIOR PARAMORE

Junior Paramore was a dynamic, attacking, and extremely hard-tackling flanker. With his cousin Terry Fanolua, the pair were among the most popular players ever to pull on the Cherry and White jersey.

Junior played for Gloucester from 2000 to 2004, making 116 appearances and scoring 29 tries. After scoring, his face always carried a wide grin as he received the cheers of the Shed. He won 28 caps for Samoa, and played for them in the World Cups of 1995 and 1999.

Junior was born on 18 November 1968 in Apia, Samoa. At the age of 15 he moved to New Zealand and played for East Tamaki and Manurewa. He won his first cap for Samoa (then known as Western Samoa) in 1991 against Tonga. In the World Cup of 1995 he appeared

in wins against Italy and Argentina, and the losing quarter final against South Africa. In the 1999 World Cup he was part of a famous win over Wales.

In 1996 Junior had a brief flirtation with rugby league at Castleford, before he was recruited by Bedford, where he played for three seasons, and was voted their player of the season in 1996-97. He appeared at centre against Gloucester in the Cheltenham & Gloucester Cup Final in 1998, and the same teams contested the following year's final, where Junior was on the flank. Gloucester won both games.

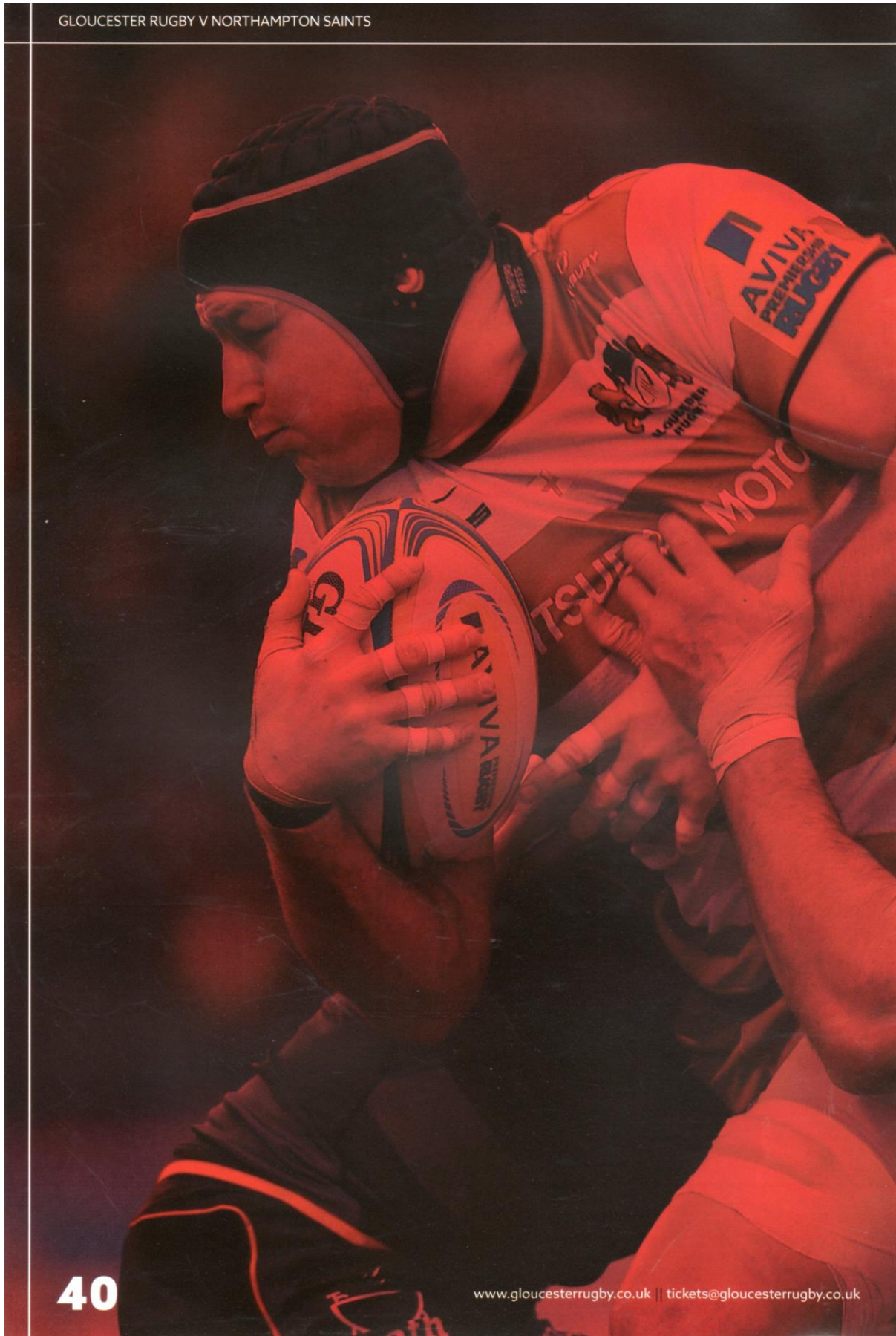
Junior signed for Gloucester in April 1999, but due to injury did not make his debut until January 2000 against Bath in the Tetley's Bitter Cup.

The following season Gloucester qualified for the Heineken Cup for the first time and Paramore was in the team which lost to Leicester, the eventual champions, in the semi-final.

He was also in the Zurich Championship winning team of 2002 which beat Bristol at Twickenham, and he came off the bench in the Powergen Cup final in 2003, which Gloucester won handsomely against Northampton, again at Twickenham. That season the club topped the league by 15 points, but Junior was in the team which lost the league final to Wasps, to thwart a league and cup double.

Many supporters may remember, in his final days at Gloucester, Junior would often come off the bench after an hour and deliberately run a curve to take him near the opposition with a wide grin on his face, promising a fresh confrontation, which few opponents relished.

At the end of the 2003-04 season Junior took up a post as Bedford's player/coach, but in April 2006, the recurrence of a neck injury ended his playing career. Coaching posts followed at Luton, Bournemouth (together with ex-Gloucester player Robert Todd) and Basingstoke.



LEADING THE CHARGE





Steady progression has been a feature of recent seasons for the Cherry and Whites, as a young, talented and hungry squad strive to dine at the top tables of domestic and European rugby.

Ben Morgan is a senior member of the squad now, a virtual veteran now in his fifth campaign in Cherry and White, and a huge part of a Gloucester pack that are muscling their way back to the heights of former glories.

And after a challenging few seasons, Morgan is looking to push his way to the front to lead the charge.

"2015 was an interesting one for me, and then into 2016, I've built myself back to where I want to be.

"Obviously, my short term went back to the middle of January last year, and the injury and then proceeded to the recovery to make Rugby World Cup 2015, and then the disappointing campaign.

"A NOD TO DAN TOBIN WHO HAS COME ON BOARD WITH THE SQUAD, AND HE HAS HELPED ME GET TO THE STATE I WANT TO BE, AND THEREFORE CONTINUE TO DEVELOP AS WELL."

That was a massive year for me, trying to get back to fitness and, in truth, it felt like it took me a long time to get back to full fitness.

"Right now however, I feel like I am back to full fitness, and I was able to have a full preseason, probably for the first time in three or four years, which has been really helpful.



"A nod to Dan Tobin who has come on board with the squad, and he has helped me get to the state I want to be, and therefore continue to develop as well."

It's not just personal development that Morgan is calling on, but the development of the squad collective, as the Cherry and White unit continue to display bright signs for the future.

"I think it's just the progressions and developments and plans in place to take the team forward that were something that I was really attracted to when it came to signing the new deal recently.

"I believe this squad that we have got, as well as the additions coming in are only going to make us stronger in the long term. Going forward, I believe that we have the tools here to be a Top Four side and that is something I am keen to be part of."

In modern rugby, a local affinity is hard to find in professional rugby, but for a man born in the county, and schooled rugby-wise in Dursley, Gloucester is definitely the place for him.

"I grew up supporting the club, I would stand on my Dad's shoulder or sit in front of the boards when I was younger. I've got fond memories of coming up to Kingsholm to watch games as a supporter, and to now be a player is a very special connection that I hold very strongly.

"I think every lad around Gloucestershire has grown up wanting to play for Gloucester Rugby, so for me to realise that is very special."

Looking back on the current season to date, Morgan is quick to identify that the Cherry and Whites were a bit slow out of the blocks.

"I think we had a bit of a slow start, and then started to build. I don't think that we have been

able to put in a full eighty minutes where everything has clicked yet. However, in most of the games we have shown snapshots of what we are capable of.

"The good thing is that we've able to put in solid performances, but they are not complete yet and this is something that we are aspiring to achieve in the coming weeks. The challenge now is to get the consistency to deliver the top performances every week."

Recently, Morgan put pen to paper on a new deal with the club, and the number eight explains how he was grateful that the offer from David Humphreys was on the table so early, and he could keep his focus on the matters on the pitch.

"I think that I've said it before, about the plusses of Gloucester, and where the team are trying to be.

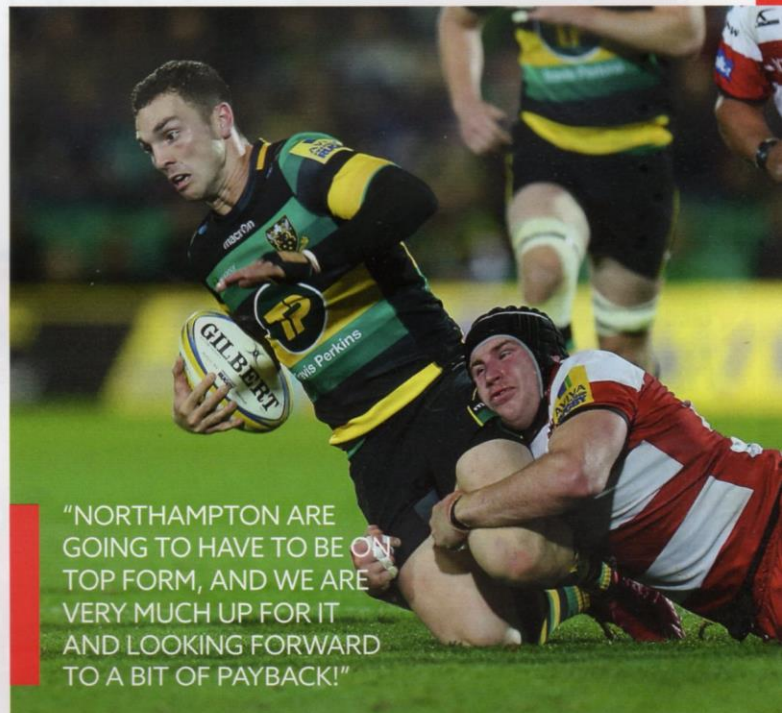
"The attraction is to be part of this team and be there when we get to where we are going. Whether

this involves being in the top tier of European Rugby and challenging in the Premiership. But I think the way the coaching team and squad are building, is a really powerful belief."

It is that belief that will be key this afternoon, when a powerhouse of the recent English club game roll into Kingsholm, and the Cherry and Whites will need to put their best foot forward and believe in each other to get the result on home soil.

"That belief is it. We don't approach a game thinking that we are going to come second best. Northampton away was a tough one, a frustrating game for us. Looking back on it, I felt as if they had a few fortunate scores, but otherwise we had a really good crack at them.

"Kingsholm has been a really good place for us in recent weeks, and it's a tough place to come and play for any team. Northampton are going to have to be on top form, and we are very much up for it and looking forward to a bit of payback!"



"NORTHAMPTON ARE GOING TO HAVE TO BE ON TOP FORM, AND WE ARE VERY MUCH UP FOR IT AND LOOKING FORWARD TO A BIT OF PAYBACK!"



KINGSHOLM NEWS

with

Bob Fenton

First of all, Happy New Year everyone. I hope 2017 brings health, happiness and five points today.

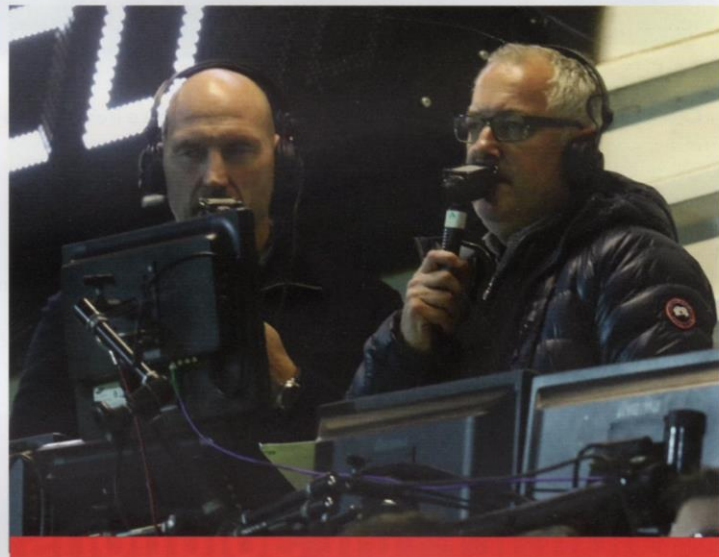
If your Christmas break was anything like mine then you'll be just as happy as me to get back here for a bit of live entertainment. I really don't think I could cope with yet another viewing of the endless saga of Home Alone films and once-a-year Disney 'spectaculars'.

And if your house was anything like my house, everyone in the room was either looking at a phone or tablet while said televisual extravaganza was on. Yet when I wanted to do something sensible - like flicking channels to watch the Bristol v Worcester game - suddenly the whole room is apparently entranced by the repetitive TV offering and I get banished!

Sometimes it's hard being me...

Talking of the Bristol - Worcester game, yet another red card for an offence that a season ago would have been a yellow at best. Go back a little further and it would have probably been a penalty at worst. An incident for a 'no arm tackle' in the Saints game on Christmas Eve almost saw someone sent to the bin, fortunately the TMO in this case seemed to persuade the ref - who was halfway to his pocket - to think again.

As I said at the time when that incident happened, many more of these changes and we'll be seeing



"I'VE GOT NEWS FOR YOU - YOU'RE NOT! EVEN IF ONE LAUGHABLY SAID ON TV THAT IT WAS HIS JOB TO '... PUT THE FANS' POINT OF VIEW ACROSS...! MATE, YOU COULDN'T HAVE BEEN FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH IF YOU HAD GOT ON A PLANE AND FLOWN A MILLION MILES AWAY."

the players running out with tags around their belts. It's a contact sport for heaven's sake! Give it a few seasons and at this rate we'll see players sent to the bin for giving another player a bit of a sideways glance!

The worst thing for me, and this is very much just my opinion, that this constant push for change is coming not from supporters or players, but from 'pundits' who have the benefit of a million slow motion replays to look at, and think that they are some kind of moral guardian for the sport.

I've got news for you - you're not! Even if one laughably said on TV that it was his job to '... put the fans' point of view across...! Mate, you

couldn't have been further from the truth if you had got on a plane and flown a million miles away. Ask any fan why they love the sport and they'll tell you that it is the attrition, the battle, the ferocity of the game.

This may sound a bit odd to you, Mr oh so clever pundit, but a game doesn't need 64 tries to be interesting. A hard fought 9-6 battle can be just as enthralling as any try fest. But then I guess you have to think about your advertising revenue.

Obviously player safety is important, no one wants to see anyone getting hurt, but the endless sanitisation of the game is killing it. Imagine if we transported one of those infamous mid-week games against the Welsh sides in the 80s and 90s - the ones when the ball was optional for the first quarter - there would have been no one left on the field by half time!!

But enough of that - it's far too early in the New Year for a soap box rant. Let's talk about 'when is a penalty not a penalty'? Well the obvious answer is 'When it is not awarded, otherwise it's just conjecture'.

But what, dear readers, when there is clear video evidence of - say - a ball being kicked out of a scrum half's hands at a ruck, and there is also evidence of a referee putting his arm out to indicate said penalty, only to pull it back several seconds later?

Nope, still not a penalty. Maybe by now we'll know the reasons why that bizarre split second of a game happened, or perhaps not. Either way at the time of writing it still leaves a bit of a bitter taste in the mouth, especially as less than two hours previously, I had been opining that JP Doyle was probably the best referee in the Premiership at the moment. Maybe that bitter taste is me eating my words...

In case you have been in a cave or a Christmas-induced alcoholic



state you will, by now, have twigged that I was talking about 'Big Game Whatever' last weekend, and the rather farcical way it ended for us.

To be honest we did well to get that close - the first half was a bit of a horror show. Speaking as someone who has never given a team talk, I'm in no position to say how effective they are, but maybe as someone who does 'words' for a living, I can offer a bit of advice for something that maybe could be included next time:

"Boys, you are allowed to play in the first bit of the game too!"

I know we tried that against Leicester in our first game of the season and that didn't pan out too well, but recently - Bristol, La Rochelle away and then last week - we've given ourselves a mountain to climb once we do decide to get going!

Back to today. It's fair to say that

Saints, a bit like us, have found things less than straightforward this season. If you go back to the pretty dire game we had up at their place earlier in the season it was like watching two old boxers going at it, but neither being able to land a decent punch.

Their form has been patchy - though they looked good against Sale pre-Christmas. They also have the excellent Louis Picamoles in the side - a genius of a player when he is at his best and an outstanding capture for them last summer. A mate of mine who is a Saints fan described him as receiving more offloads than a psychiatrist - I think I know what he meant!

Let's hope for a better game than that, and for a performance on both sides of halftime. Let's get off to a good start with a good home win - what better way is there to go into the New Year?

RANDALL on RUGBY



HAPPY NEW YEAR TO YOU.

We're a point of the season where the rhythm has been disrupted for the best part of a month. A mix of long breaks and short breaks between games, let alone playing in different competitions, isn't conducive to consistency, and today Gloucester play only five days after the narrow 28-24 defeat by Harlequins at Twickenham. Northampton's last match was nine days ago, so one wonders what impact that will have.

At least Gloucester's long term absentees are almost all back in full training now, and no player has been more warmly welcomed back into first team duty than Jeremy Thrush.

He had 40 minutes in La Rochelle - he concedes his legs were a bit heavy by that point - and then on Tuesday played 25 minutes off the bench after a brief first appearance as a blood replacement. It's a measured return to action for the 31 year old All Black, in stark contrast to last season when he was a regular in the second row.

"I find I get into a rhythm with my game if I play every week" Thrush told me. "I take pride in being out there and fronting up and I never like coming off, I was the same back home.

"I want to get back to that here even though it's a different environment with different competitions and having a bigger squad you do get more of a rest,



which is something I've got to get my head around."

His enforced rest over the first half of the season was eventually traced after an MRI scan on his back showed a bone spur which resulted in the nerve going down into his left leg "shutting off", in

Jeremy's words, his left hamstring. He was able to run for about 20 minutes but then it would tighten up.

An epidural has slowly seen an improvement since, and he was able to train for two full weeks before playing in La Rochelle.



Greater time on the pitch will come as the leg capacity matches the lung capacity.

Thrush's leadership and drive from the second row was seen as a major asset when he arrived, but despite making 16 Premiership appearances last winter Gloucester couldn't secure a Champions Cup place. A year on, and with the bearded Kiwi having missed a big chunk of rugby, Gloucester again find themselves outside the top six looking in but Thrush can see progress in a squad only changed on the fringes in the summer.

"We have matured over the last year, even though everyone wants progress to be faster," he went on.

"We are finding a style we can play and perform well in, even if it means not holding onto the ball for long periods but kicking and putting teams under pressure. Winning is contagious and it can cover flaws when the game isn't pretty. When you lose, those little things stick out.

"I feel we are moving forward and the challenge is to maintain high standards every week by every individual being hard on themselves in terms of what they need to do."

Thrush paid tribute to the Kingsholm medical team for the



dedication in getting him back both physically fit and in the right frame of mind to push himself and those in his position. Tom Savage's workload has been the heaviest so far this season and like Thrush he seems to thrive from that rhythm of regular games, but the ability to rotate a little more must surely be to everyone's benefit.

Northampton arrive here today after a strange first half to the season. Their form considering the names on their team sheet has been (to put it politely) scratchy, and they have had more attention than they would have wanted over

Dylan Hartley's latest suspension and George North's recent head injury.

Tom Wood also raised an eyebrow or two with his brutal honesty about the home performance against Leinster in the Champions Cup, when he said he sensed in the warm-up that the team seemed flat and that he was worried about the outcome.

Today's game will test how far spirits have been lifted by the win over Sale, and according to Thrush, Northampton will face a more vocal Gloucester than last season.



"Over the last six months the players have taken more ownership of what we are doing, not only in games but also in training" he said.

"When I first arrived it was a quiet group. If you give people that ownership they take pride in it, and that has come out in meetings when we look at the opposition. I'm sure Northampton are not happy with where they are, and if we can shut down their big ball carriers it'll put us in a good place.

"My expectation is that in every home game we produce a performance and we've not lost hope in terms of where we want to go this year."

ACADEMY UPDATE



NEIL McCARTHY

HEAD OF ACADEMY
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Gloucester United 26 Bath United 22

Gloucester United, featuring a number of Academy prospects, kept their hopes of qualifying for the semi-finals of this season's Aviva Premiership A League with a hard-fought 26-22 victory over Bath United.



ALEX GUEST

JUNIOR ACADEMY COACH
SPONSOR

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The bonus point victory moves the United into second place in the Southern Conference, just one point behind Exeter Braves with only a home fixture against the Devon based outfit to come on April 10th. Win that game and the United will go through.

The triumph over Bath was very much based on a strong defensive platform. The visitors enjoyed more than their fair share of possession and territory, but found the Gloucester defensive line a tough nut to crack.

Having absorbed a lot of pressure, Gloucester hit Bath with a real sucker punch as Henry Purdy finished superbly after good work from the forwards.

The second try was a real gem. Andy Symons swept up a loose ball near his own line and set Ben Vellacott away. The ball was worked to Henry Purdy and then back to Symons who offloaded in stunning fashion to Thomas who scooted under the posts for a try that Protheroe converted.

Bath tried to bounce back and had several close range lineouts, but Gloucester held firm to take a 12-0 lead into half time.



GLoucester UNITED

15. Tom Hudson
14. David Halaifonua
13. Andrew Symons
12. Elliot Creed
11. Henry Purdy
10. Mat Protheroe
9. Ben Vellacott
1. Cameron Orr
2. Henry Walker
3. Salesi Ma'afu
4. Charlie Beckett (c)
5. Tom Denton
6. Freddie Clarke
7. Dan Thomas
8. Gareth Evans

Replacements:

16. Tom Lindsay
17. Paddy McAllister
18. Ciaran Knight
19. Harry Wilson
20. Will Safe
21. Harry Randall
22. Harry Robinson
23. Charlie Chapman

Will Partington kicked an early second half penalty to get Bath off and running, but Gloucester looked to have made the game safe with tries from Josh McNulty and David Halaifonua for a 26-3 lead.

However, Bath suddenly started to find some gaps and hit back with tries from Davies, Partington and Fruean as the Cherry and Whites looked to have switched off a touch.

The final few moments were nervy, but Bath's last chance resulted in a forward pass and Gloucester had hung on for the win.

Sponsor an academy player or member of the coaching team
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ACTION REPLAY || THURSDAY 8 DECEMBER || KINGSHOLM || ATT 12,354

Gloucester Rugby 35

Tries: Atkinson, Hohneck, Thorley, Scott. Conversions: Laidlaw (3). Penalties: Laidlaw (3).

La Rochelle 14

Tries: Gourdon, Raikuna. Conversions: Holmes (2).

Gloucester took a significant step towards topping Pool One of the European Rugby Challenge Cup with an impressive 35-14 victory over Stade Rochelais in the first of a double-header between the two sides, but quickly recognised that it was only job half done.

The French side, who have invested heavily in their playing squad in recent times, named a powerful looking side and started well on the evening as they took an early lead through Kevin Gourdon.

However, Gloucester responded with an impressive fightback, Billy Burns pulling the strings at fly-half in possibly his most impressive first team performance to date, and hit back with three tries of their own before half-time.

'Inspired' by a half-time team-talk by Patrice Collazo, featuring the former Gloucester prop kicking a drinks cooler which was to later go



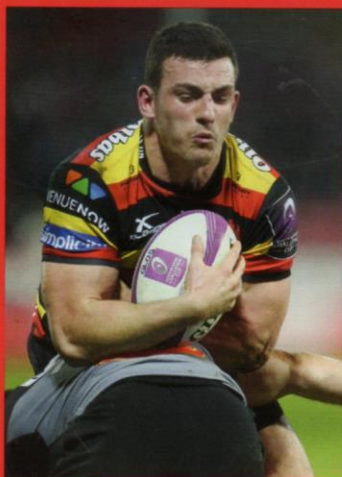
viral, the Top 14 side did come out with a refreshed attitude after the interval, but Gloucester soaked up the pressure and closed the game out.

The win, all the more impressive given that Gloucester had made ten changes to the starting line-up from the side selected for the Bristol game five days earlier, maintained the recent good form and sent the Cherry and Whites five points clear at the top of Pool One.

However, with a trip to the Stade Marcel Deflandre looming, and an immediate opportunity for La Rochelle to gain revenge, no-one connected with Gloucester was getting too carried away after the game. There was still work to do.

As the teams emerged on the night, the sheer size of some of the visiting forwards was clearly evident and, when Stade Rochelais, powered their way into scoring position for Kevin Gourdon to touch down, a long evening seemed to lie ahead of Gloucester.

But Gloucester's reaction was



- 15 Halaifonua
- 14 Thorley 1T
- 13 Scott 1T
- 12 Atkinson 1T
- 11 Purdy
- 10 Burns ▼
- 9 Laidlaw 3P 3C
- 1 Hohneck 1T ▼
- 2 Matu'u ▼
- 3 Ma'afu ▼
- 4 Savage ▼
- 5 Latta ▼
- 6 Moriarty
- 7 Kvesic
- 8 Evans ▼

Replacements used:
Hibbard, Y Thomas,
Doran-Jones, Denton,
Clarke, Braley,
Ludlow

- 15 Rattez
- 14 Lacroix
- 13 Barry ▼
- 12 Botia
- 11 Raikuna 1T ▼
- 10 Holmes 2C
- 9 Januarie ▼
- 1 Corbel ▼
- 2 Fobes
- 3 Atonio ▼
- 4 Eaton
- 5 Tanguay ▼
- 6 Gourdon 1T ▼
- 7 Vito
- 8 Nailiko

Replacements used:
Gau, Priso,
Boughanmi,
Lagrange, Sazy,
Bales, James, Roudil

quick and determined. With Burns kicking beautifully out of hand and ensuring the Cherry and Whites played the game in the right areas, the tide started to turn.

Mark Atkinson was held up over the line on one occasion, but made no mistake a few minutes later. Henry Purdy then showed great awareness and good hands to offload inside for Josh Hohnock to score his first try on his first start.

Burns then inspired a memorable third as his chip over the top, hacked on by Matt Scott, set up a position from which he then floated a cross kick for Ollie Thorley to catch and touch down. It had been some 15 minutes for Gloucester.

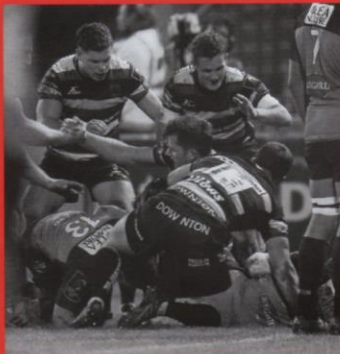
The visitors, presumably with the words of Collazo ringing in their ears, narrowed the gap with a try from David Raikuna and alarm bells could have started to ring.



Gloucester stuck to their game plan though, eked out a couple of penalty chances for Greig Laidlaw and the skipper made no mistake.

All that was needed now was a fourth try to secure the bonus point, and it duly came on 77 minutes as Matt Scott's run was perfectly angled as he gathered in a flat pass from Callum Braley and steamed over.

Job done and on to France for Round Four.



APPLYING THE LAW WITH



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There were a couple of close calls on the evening – Henry Purdy's early try-scoring attempt and Billy Burns thinking he had scored. But, refreshingly, the officials backed their judgement on the evening and got both calls spot on which helped keep the game flowing.



HEAD COACH LAURIE FISHER

"It was a great win but also a really great performance," said Fisher.

"The forwards provided the platform, the nines and 10s control the game and in the midfield and out the back everybody did their job."

ACTION REPLAY || SATURDAY 17 DECEMBER || STADE MACEL DEFLANDRE || ATT 14,153

La Rochelle 42

Tries: Lacroix (2), Murimurivalu, Forbes, Botia, Penalty. Tries: James (2). Conversions: James (2), Holmes.

Gloucester Rugby 13

Tries: Afoa. Conversions: Burns, Penalties: Burns (2).



Gloucester entered the second leg of the double-header in good spirits, on the back of a decent run of form and having defeated the same opponent comprehensively at Kingsholm just over a week earlier.

However, 80 minutes later, it was the home supporters who were ecstatically acclaiming their team with Stade Rochelais having delivered as close to a perfect performance as you will see.

Try as they might, Gloucester simply couldn't live with their French counterparts who, with Brock James directing operations superbly, could do no wrong.

The Cherry and Whites weren't at their best, it's fair to say, but even if



they'd been performing at the peak of their powers, it would have been a tough ask to keep pace with the French side.

It was a clear indication of just how good La Rochelle have been in the Top 14 this season, they're not sat in fourth place currently for no reason and boasting a formidable home record. They were a completely different proposition from nine days earlier.

The Stade Marcel Deflandre was a real cauldron throughout and, once the home team had edged in front, it was always going to be a tough ask for Gloucester.

The first half though was actually a close run thing. Billy Burns kicked an early penalty, but

- 15 Murimurivalu 1T
- 14 Lacroix 2T ▼
- 13 Jordaan
- 12 Aguilon ▼
- 11 Rattet
- 10 James 2P, 2C ▼
- 9 Bales
- 1 Corbel ▼
- 2 Forbes 1T ▼
- 3 Atonio ▼
- 4 Nailliko
- 5 Tanguy ▼
- 6 Sazy ▼
- 7 Eaton
- 8 Vito

Replacements used:
Maurouard, Priso,
Boughanmi, Cedaro,
Francoz, Retiere,
Holmes 1C, Botia 1T.

- 15 Hook
- 14 Sharples
- 13 Scott ■
- 12 Atkinson ▼
- 11 May
- 10 Burns 1C, 2P ▼
- 9 Braley ▼
- 1 Hohneck ▼
- 2 Hlbbard ▼
- 3 Afoa 1T ▼
- 4 Savage
- 5 Thrush ▼
- 6 Ludlow ▼
- 7 Rowan
- 8 Morgan

Replacements used:
Matu'u, Y Thomas,
Doran-Jones, Latta,
Galarza, Heinz,
Purdy, Kvesic.



James responded with two of his own to give the home team the advantage. The first of a series of scintillating line breaks and offloads then created a try for winger Gabriel Lacroix.

Burns kicked his second penalty to get Gloucester back into matters at 11-6 and, with ten minutes left to play until half time, the Cherry and Whites could consider themselves in with a sniff.

However, Gloucester were left to rue not having made more of their scoring opportunities as La Rochelle clinically finished off two chances in the run up to half-time. James inspired the first for Murimurivalu before the big French pack drove their way over for their third of the night.

Gloucester regrouped at half-time

and quickly crossed the whitewash through John Afoa to give themselves a glimmer of hope, but it was quickly snuffed out as the home team hit back in style.

Matt Scott was yellow carded as Gloucester were opened up by Botia, and the home team took full advantage of the extra man as Lacroix went over for his second.

Murimurivalu and Botia then combined to carve open the defence from deep before the pack completed a memorable night for the home side with a penalty try and a 42-13 scoreline.

With two rounds left to play, both teams are now on 15 points, but it's advantage to the French side who boast a superior points difference and try scoring record.



APPLYING THE LAW WITH



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Fussy is possibly the politest way of describing the performance of referee Ian Davies on the evening, as he blew up for virtually everything especially marginally forward passes and lineouts a fraction off line.

The yellow card for Matt Scott was probably a correct call, but the decision to award a penalty try seemed a little hasty with La Rochelle losing control of the ball and no certainty that a try would be scored.



DIRECTOR OF RUGBY

DAVID HUMPHREYS

"It takes control of the pool out of our hands but now we've got to park Europe, we've got a huge three weeks in the Premiership starting with Harlequins on the 27th.

"This was probably a bit of a reality check so the next 10 days are going to be about getting ourselves ready physically and mentally for what is a huge game for us."



TEAM LINE-UPS

SUNDAY 1 JANUARY
AVIVA PREMIERSHIP
RUGBY ROUND 12



T P C D				T P C D									
				JAMES HOOK	15	FULLBACK	15	BEN FODEN					
				CHARLIE SHARPLES	14	RIGHT WING	14	KEN PISI					
				MATT SCOTT	13	OUTSIDE CENTRE	13	LUTHER BURRELL					
				BILLY TWELVETREES	12	INSIDE CENTRE	12	JJ HANRAHAN					
				JONNY MAY	11	LEFT WING	11	JUAN PABLO ESTELLES					
				BILLY BURNS	10	FLY-HALF	10	STEPHEN MYLER					
				GREIG LAIDLAW (C)	9	SCRUM HALF	9	NIC GROOM					
				PADDY MCALLISTER	1	LOOSEHEAD PROP	1	ALEX WALLER					
				RICHARD HIBBARD	2	HOOKER	2	MIKE HAYWOOD					
				JOSH HOHNECK	3	TIGHTHEAD PROP	3	KIERAN BROOKES					
				TOM SAVAGE	4	LOCK	4	COURTNEY LAWES					
				MARIANO GALARZA	5	LOCK	5	CHRISTIAN DAY					
				ROSS MORIARTY	6	BLINDSIDE FLANKER	6	TOM WOOD (C)					
				JACOB ROWAN	7	OPENSIDE FLANKER	7	TEIMANA HARRISON					
				BEN MORGAN	8	NUMBER 8	8	LOUIS PICAMOLES					
				REPLACEMENTS				REPLACEMENTS					
				MOTU MATU'U	16			16	CHARLIE CLARE				
				YANN THOMAS	17			17	ETHAN WALLER				
				SALESI MA'AFU	18	MATCH OFFICIALS		18	PAUL HILL				
				JEREMY THRUSH	19	REFEREE: Matthew Carley		19	API RATUNIYARAWA				
				MATT KVESIC	20	ASSISTANT REFEREES: Dean Richards & Nigel Carrick		20	JAMIE GIBSON				
				WILLI HEINZ	21			21	TOM KESSELL				
				ANDREW SYMONS	22			22	JAMES WILSON				
				HENRY PURDY	23			23	NAFI TUITAVAKE				