

THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2003

JON'S DOUBLE SINKS SARRIES

KINGSHOLM IS A HAPPY PLACE AFTER SARACENS ARE MASHED

GLOUCESTER 30 SARACENS 7

GLOUCESTER : J. Goodridge; M. Garvey, R. Todd, H. Paul, J. Simpson-Daniel; S. Amor, A. Page; P. Johnstone, S. Brotherstone, A. Olver, A. Brown, M. Cornwell, J. Boer, A. Hazell, J. Paramore.

Reps: N. Wood, C. Fortey, A. Eustace, P. Buxton, J. Frape, R. Teague.

SARACENS : T. Castaignède; R. Haughton, P. Bailey, K. Sorrell, N. McAvoy; A. Goode, D. Kirton; S. Sparks, J. Ross, E. Bergamaschi, S. Raiwalui (c), K. Chesney, T. Roques, R. Peacey, T. Randell.

Reps: A. Kershaw, J. Parkes, B. Broster, B. Skirving, P. Phibbs, B. Johnstone, A. Winnan.

Referee : S. Leyshon (RFU).

Four tries, a thumping victory and the smiles were back on the faces at Kingsholm following Gloucester's crushing success over Saracens.

This was the Zurich Premiership in its rawest glory. Saracens could not have been more beaten up if they had nipped down to the docks for a spot of late night shenanigans.

Gloucester's attitude had always been well know but there was a relish to move possession that built on the outstanding work of the home pack where such luminaries as Junior Paramore, Andy Hazell and Alex Brown were outstanding. It allowed Henry Paul, always willing and able to get stuck in as only he knows how, and it created a width of victory Saracens could not match.

There was only one try in the first period, but it was a peach, an outstanding advert of close-range passing between the forwards and a pacy finish from Jon Goodridge.

It arrived at a crucial time, 17 minutes before the interval and took Gloucester 10-0 ahead.

James Simpson-Daniel fielded a high kick from Thomas Castaignède and ran across midfield on the counter-attack. Henry Paul, continually involved, breathed life into the attack before Junior Paramore came short to punch the first hole in Saracens' defence and Alex Brown's long strides made more of a gap.

His outstanding inside ball found Jake Boer and in a flash Goodridge appeared on his right shoulder to race in for the try.

If that was the highlight, there was still plenty of break-neck rugby to enjoy. Far from being a classic, it was impossible to escape the enjoyment as both sides went at a frantic pace from the start.

Gloucester seemed determined to spread play as quickly to the flanks of Simpson-Daniel and Marcel Garvey as possible to exploit Saracens' supposed weakness to the counter-attack.

But there were some outstanding contributions close to the brimstone. Alex Brown, always in support, had a titanic half before retiring through injury. He was telescopic in the line-out, where Gloucester totally dominated, and always available to keep the pace flowing.

Andy Hazell had by far his best 40 minutes of the season, full of pace and menace at the breakdown. One surging break from a line-out had the crowd panting its appreciation, while Junior Paramore clattered into tackles around the fringes.

But how Saracens were not at least level at the break was something of a mystery. They should have scored immediately after Gloucester's try but made an astonishing hash of a simple score.

Castaignède straightened an attack close to the line and his pass to Nathan McAvoy[*sic*]. He was virtually over the line before Hazell managed to put in a desperate tackle and the winger dropped the ball in a crazy piece of non-skill.

However, it was to get worse. Minutes before the break Castaignède was the sinner in the same corner when, under the attentions of Paramore, he coughed up possession with the try in sight.

If Saracens had not been so profligate, they could have been ahead. But Paul kicked two penalties to extend Gloucester's advantage.

There was some riveting support play, while the scrummage was contested with considerable menace.

HALF-TIME :
GLOUCESTER 13
SARACENS 0

Saracens responded at the start of the second half with a try straight out of the home side's manual. Andy Goode, who had kicked away most of their first half possession, landed a penalty in the corner and the rest, as they say, is history.

Kris Chesney caught the line-out and with Gordon Ross in support, Taine Randell was driven over for the score.

It was impossible to say they did not deserve one and it cut the deficit to something seriously manageable.

But Paul, an irresistible force in the centre, took it upon himself to control the game. Simon Amor was just content to ship possession forward to him for Paul to strut his stuff and he did it wonderfully well.

After Adam Eustace, on for Brown, stole a line-out and Hazell and Adrian Olver then clattered forward, Paul took over again. He linked with Mark Cornwell and from the breakdown, he and Todd came right and from Paul's short pass Goodridge sped over for his second try. The advantage was restored.

The full-back was another one to have an excellent afternoon. He combines booming kicks from both feet with a calmness in defence that was outstanding.

One turn, chase and tackle on Kevin Sorrell was the defensive movement of the match; he made up six or seven yards with comfort.

Gloucester were well on top now and when Chesney, never one to avoid a confrontation if there is one to be had, was yellow carded for pinning down Boer, the home side took advantage.

A couple of red-blooded challenges in midfield, one from Chris Fortey, spilled the ball into Todd's hands and he set off to the line.

Without the pace to beat Haughton, he found Simpson-Daniel, who went over for a comeback try and Gloucester's third.

Suddenly, the temperature had risen considerably. Tempers boiled over up front – an area of the game Gloucester gradually dominated – as Saracens could not contend with Gloucester's man advantage.

Their fourth try arrived when Olver and Nick Wood put the squeeze on at a scrum and when the ball shot back, Alex Page put James Forrester scooting away for the try.

Paul could not convert but his side were in total control. It was just the type of convincing victory to ensure the home fires burn considerably.