

THE CITIZEN

MONDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2003

GLOUCESTER FALL TO FALCONS

LEAKY DEFENCE IS EXPOSED AT KINGSTON PARK

NEWCASTLE 42 GLOUCESTER 22

NEWCASTLE: B. Gollings; T. May (J. Shaw 71), J. Noon, M. Mayerhofler, M. Stephenson; P. Godman, H. Charlton; I. Peel, N. Makin (M. Thompson 73), M. Hurter, G. Archer, M. Andrews (c), J. Dunbar, W. Britz (P. Dowson 76), H. Vyvyan.

Reps not used : M. Ward, D. Wilson, C. Hamilton, J. Grindal.

GLOUCESTER: J. Goodridge; M. Garvey, R. Todd, H. Paul, J. Simpson-Daniel; S. Amor, A. Page; P. Johnstone (N. Wood 39), S. Brotherstone (C. Fortey 40), A. Olver, A. Brown, M. Cornwell (A. Eustace 68), J. Boer (c), J. Paramore (J. Forrester 35).

Reps: J. Frape, R. Teague.

Referee : R. Maybank (RFU).

Star Man : Jake Boer.

Attendance : 6,102

On their way to Twickenham last season, Gloucester lost only three times. Only a month into the new campaign, they have been beaten twice already.

And while that will not overly surprise many of the sages at Castle Grim, they will be scratching their heads to fathom out how they were so uncomfortably second best on an afternoon when their defence looked about as reliable as a testimony at the Hutton Inquiry.

But the level of finishing was so good it produced eight tries – five for the home side – the commitment so desperate and attitude never anything other than full throttle, there is simply no game like it on days like yesterday.

The Premiership remains in rude good health – even with the World Cup only a short rolling maul away – and both these sides contributed to a rip-roaring contest.

However, if Nigel Melville was seriously planning a spot of 'rugby terrorism,' his booby-trap blew up in his face because Gloucester's defence was so poor.

Without the luxury of a bonus point, every away defeat heaps pressure on the next home game.

There is no opportunity to create any breathing space and that will be a major cause for concern.

Newcastle's margin of victory was fully deserved and clinically produced. Apart from a dodgy set-piece, they made a real mess of Gloucester at the breakdown, particularly around the rucks and mauls, where they worked themselves into so much space it was criminal.

Ian Peel and Mark Andrews never operated at anything below boiling point and once they were in behind the gain-line, it allowed Hugh Vyvyan, an intelligent and mobile ball carrier, to cause merry hell.

He popped up just about everywhere in a terrific display that ensured one of the most imaginative teams in the country asked so many questions of one that is supposed to be the meanest.

Away from the muck and brass, Hall Charlton and Phil Godman whipped so much quick ball away to the grateful hands of Mark Mayerhofler and Jamie Noon – it was no wonder Newcastle scored five times.

They were simply more dangerous than Gloucester more often, who had plenty of the ball but lacked consistent penetration.

While Mayerhofler held it together, Tom May, who helped himself to his first Premiership hat-trick, and Michael Stephenson, continually forced themselves over the advantage line.

The same could not be said of Gloucester. Only Henry Paul consistently threatened to cause problems and despite a characteristically forthright performance from their skipper, Jake Boer, and an energetic display from Andy Hazell, Gloucester suffered horrendously in the contact area and in their retention of the ball.

Amid the wreckage of a seriously worrying defensive performance, there was the odd bright spot.

Their first try was nothing short of sensational while James Simpson-Daniel's finish for their second was equally mesmerising.

Junior Paramore's eye for a break and pass set up the first when he and Marcel Garvey combined before Simon Amor, nothing short of competitive throughout, straightened an attack.

When they swung play to the left, the Cherry invaders, inspired by Paul's long pass, found room for Robert Todd and Simpson-Daniel before Brown snuck his ball away to Jon Goodridge, who scored.

May, who for some reason put his head in the way of Brown, was not so dozy that he missed out on an equalising try.

Gloucester may feel slightly aggrieved because referee Roy Maybank, who for some reason sported silver boots, blocked Boer's attempted tackle on Charlton from the scrum.

But the scrum-half was away and when he got in behind, May was able to beat Goodridge into the corner.

It set into motion a devastating passage of play that took the game away from Gloucester.

May was in again three minutes later, tearing onto an outside break from Vyvyan to score, and four minutes before the break, the Falcons had their third try.

If Gloucester had been disappointed with the first two, they will be seething about Jamie Noon's effort.

Paul Johnstone was turned over in midfield, Nick Makin, hardly in the rampaging category as front row forwards go, ran into open space alongside the equally industrious Warren Britz and Noon had enough gas to escape Goodridge and score.

The amount of quick ball saw Noon and May in clear space and they exploited it to devastating effect.

To be fair to Gloucester, they were never anything other than determined and launched a stinging raid immediately after the interval that hinted at a recovery.

Alex Page took a quick tap penalty, Todd fed James Forrester and the number eight sent Simpson-Daniel hurtling away down the touchline as if he were on a tight-rope to score.

But Gloucester were not water-tight enough to build on the foundations and their sieve-like defence leaked again.

With the defence up flat, Charlton launched a high kick behind Simpson-Daniel from a scrum and May hurtled forward, took the catch and completed his hat-trick.

"I don't remember too much about it after I banged by head against Alex Brown – I had to talk to the lads to help me out," May said.

"It was my first Premiership hat-trick and I was really pleased."

The fun did not stop there. Gloucester launched a savage late rally for a bonus point that brought a try for Boer from a line-out and they battered the Newcastle line for a fourth thereafter.

But they could not get it and the Falcons ensured a thoroughly deserved margin of victory with Stephenson's score.

He broke away after possession had been recycled from a line-out and exposed Goodridge as the last defender to slide home.

Gloucester shot out of Kingston park afterwards to catch a 6 o'clock train home. We can only hope they did not miss it.

DOUBLE INJURY BLOW PILES ON THE AGONY

Gloucester escaped Kingston Park last night a chastened and well beaten team – with serious injury concerns hanging over Junior Paramore and Paul Johnstone.

Director of rugby Nigel Melville admitted Paramore suffered a suspected broken right arm and Johnstone a head injury during their 42-22 defeat at Newcastle.

Gloucester, who slipped into mid-table with their second away defeat, dropped the pair off at hospital in York last night for further examination before they made their way to Birmingham by train.

But Paramore was withdrawn in considerable pain and Johnstone was also replaced after appearing to be knocked out in the first half.

Melville may now have to press Andy Deacon back into action against Leicester on Saturday – despite the fact he has a calf injury – if Johnstone's injury is serious.

"We think Junior has broken his arm and has gone for an X-ray," Melville confirmed.

"He immediately said it was broken and I am sure he is a pretty good judge of that. We watched the video back on the train and you cannot see how he does it.

"Paul Johnstone also took a bang on the head but both have been released from hospital and we will wait to see how they are."

Gloucester will hope he has not suffered concussion because that would mean an automatic three-week lay-off in an area where Melville is already at full stretch.

Of the five-try defeat, Melville added: "We missed some soft tackles and defended very poorly.

"Newcastle were 20 points better than us on the day. They got on a roll and we could not stop them – it was one of those days and it was a particularly poor performance."

Gloucester scored three tries and two were of the highest class from Jon Goodridge and James Simpson-Daniel, while Jake Boer grabbed the other.

But Tom May's first Premiership hat-trick and scores for Jamie Noon and Michael Stephenson wrapped up an emphatic home win.

JC