

THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2003

GLOUCESTER HOLD ON TO CLOSE ON LEADERS
MADE TO SWEAT BY STRONG TYKES COMEBACK

GLOUCESTER 24 LEEDS 19

Gloucester led 21-0 in the first half but had to withstand a Leeds fight-back before running out five-point winners.

Gloucester's tries came from James Simpson-Daniel (2) and James Forrester.

The win saw the Cherry and Whites move within five points of Premiership leaders Bath, who lost at Newcastle.

GLOUCESTER : J. Goodridge; M. Garvey, R. Todd, H. Paul, J. Simpson-Daniel; D. McRae, A. Page; P. Johnstone, C. Fortey, A. Deacon, A. Brown, M. Cornwell, J. Boer (c), A. Hazell, J. Forrester.

Reps: N. Wood, S. Brotherstone, A. Olver, A. Eustace, P. Buxton, S. Amor, J. Frape.

LEEDS : T. Walsh; D. Scarborough, P. Christophers, T. Davies, D. Rees; D. Hodge, A. Dickens; M. Shelley (c), R. Rawlinson, S. Halford, S. Hooper, P. Murphy, M. Salter, J. Ponton, D. Hyde.

Reps: M. Holt, G. Powell, S. Morgan, S. Campbell, R. Walker, M. Cardey, J. Buchanan.

Referee : S. Davey (RFU).

Gloucester edged to a hard-working victory over Leeds, but were left seething at the margin of their victory and at the officiating of referee Sean Davey.

After a blitz of three tries in half an hour, Gloucester were restricted to only three points in the remaining 50 minutes as Leeds fought their way back into the game and came close to one of the shocks of the season.

But the Cherry and Whites held on for their 34th successive home win.

When Gloucester trudged off down the tunnel for their half-time isotonic refreshment, they will have been wondering how a monstrous 21-point advantage was whittled down to only eight.

If they were rubbing their heads at the surprise of it all, Leeds disappeared positively euphoric and it was no surprise.

Alan Dickens wrote himself into something of the record books with the first try Gloucester had conceded in three matches, and Duncan Hodge contributed eight points with two penalties and a conversion.

Gloucester had slipped off the pace fairly alarmingly in the final 10 minutes of the period to leave them with plenty of work to do from what appeared a straightforward home victory.

And fair do's to Leeds. Dickens escaped from the base of the ruck on the 22 metre line to score almost anonymously in the left corner and undo much of Gloucester's good work.

Gloucester made such a ferocious start that there was nothing to suggest the problems at [the] end of the half.

Andy Hazell made such an outstanding start his first quarter contribution was one of the best seen at Kingsholm in years.

Not only did he clear out rucks, and cause so much confusion with his weight of tackling but he also carried possession in a one-man show that was terrific – one charge into Hodge left the Scotsman with a nasty taste of claret in his mouth.

Gloucester fed off his industry and hustled into an early lead. Their first try arrived after 12 minutes and it was a beauty.

Alex Page shifted possession from the base of a scrum left where Duncan McRae made a lovely slashing break across the advantage line and his long pass picked out James Simpson-Daniel who scored.

Henry Paul kicked the conversion and five minutes later he was in business again. From another set-piece, this time a line-out, James Forrester and Hazell tore past the first wave of defence up the short side.

Jake Boer got close to the line but when play came back Page, McRae and then Paul fed Simpson-Daniel who straightened the attack to score through a thicket of bodies.

Leeds were seriously up against it here. Their scrum was under serious pressure and they were clattered back in the contact area.

Scenting blood, Gloucester went for an instant kill. Boer was heavily involved to straighten an attack and when McRae came short again his high pass was plucked out of the air by Forrester on the wing who raced away to score.

But then came the Leeds recovery, started by two Hodge penalties after 35 and 39 minutes and given added incentive by Dickens' try.

HALF-TIME :

GLOUCESTER 21

LEEDS 13

Leeds' burgling raid had turned the contest into a real scrap. The Tykes deserved a great deal of credit for their gutsy response, particularly up front and they always held a chance out wide with the pace of David Rees and Phil Christophers.

Gloucester's lethargy continued at the start of the second period and when it began going against them, a stream of errors also affected their play.

They were also greatly frustrated by the officiating of Sean Davey, who drove Gloucester to distraction in and around the contact area.

Dean Ryan, their forceful coach, was so frustrated he spent most of the afternoon on the touchline and you could hardly blame him.

Hodge increased worries with a 58-minute penalty and all of Gloucester's impetus had disappeared.

There was very little shape to their play and even the line-out stopped functioning with its usual assurance.

But they were granted a respite when Paul kicked a 65th minute penalty to make the score 24-16 but the constant whistle and lack of flow was just what Leeds were looking for.

They continued to chip away, taking points from every visit into Gloucester territory and Hodge was on the mark with 10 minutes remaining to cut the deficit to only a try.

Gloucester were having to work like Trojans in the contact area to stay in touch and some of their defence late on had to be heroic because they were simply not allowed to compete for the ball in the contact area.

But there is no doubt Gloucester [will] also be highly disappointed. After three lovely tries in half an hour, a bonus point was there for [the] taking and for them to fail to take one is a major blow.

For Leeds, skipper Mike Shelley led from the front, while the rest of the pack were not too far behind in terms of commitment.

When Davey finally spotted an infringement by Leeds, it was met with a giant roar from the Shed, but there were no cards, nothing, and Gloucester were livid to the point of fury.

They went for the fourth try at the end but the final line-out drifted to an unsatisfactory conclusion.

JC