

THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2003

HEROES LEAD GLOUCESTER TO WINNING WAYS ONCE MORE

GLOUCESTER 28 NORTHAMPTON 20

GLOUCESTER : T. Delpont; M. Garvey, R. Todd, H. Paul, J. Simpson-Daniel; D. McRae, A. Gomarsall; R. Roncero, C. Fortey, A. Deacon, A. Brown, M. Cornwell, J. Boer (c), P. Buxton, J. Paramore.

Reps: R. Elloway, P. Vickery, T. Woodman, M. Rimmer, A. Hazell, S. Amor, J. Frape.

NORTHAMPTON : N. Beal; J. Brooks, M. Tucker, J. Leslie, B. Reihana; S. Drahm, M. Robinson; T. Smith, D. Richmond, R. Morris, R. Hunter, J. Phillips, G. Seely, D. Fox, A. Blowers (capt.).

Reps: M. Miles, C. Budgen, M. Soden, M. Connors, J. Howard, J. Clarke, J. Sleightholme.

Referee : T. Spreadbury (Bristol).

Star Man : Junior Paramore.

How Gloucester needed this. They have been through a seriously testing month but returned to winning ways with a three-try victory over Northampton.

Trevor Woodman made an immediate down payment on his return from England duty with a stunning try to finally break the Saints resistance but the victory was down to the effort of the entire side – particularly Junior Paramore up front and some heavy duty work from his Cherry and White cronies.

James Simpson-Daniel and Marcel Garvey got the other tries and Northampton did not even have the luxury of a bonus point at the death.

The show might not be back on the road, but it was a pretty imposing start. With enough quality possession and outstanding field position to win two matches, Gloucester somehow found themselves a score behind at the interval.

Not only did they get the dream start they would have craved – Marcel Garvey accepting an inside pass following a bullocking break from Junior Paramore after four minutes to score – but Gloucester then carved out a series of outstanding chances.

On the back of a purposeful effort from Peter Buxton, probably the pick of the home forwards, and an avalanche of possession, not always sprayed with his characteristic authority by Andy Gomarsall but plentiful all the same, Gloucester paid the price for dropped balls and wild passes.

It initially seemed so good to be back. On the crest of a raucous home reception for Gomarsall, Phil Vickery and Trevor Woodman following their World Cup glory, Gloucester started like a train. The ball stayed alive for the first four minutes until Gloucester scored and the intent seemed clear.

But there were plenty of mistakes and a gritty response from Northampton in and around the fringes where Andrew Blowers was his usual nuisance, Darren Fox got through a good deal of work and Rob Hunter also stood out.

They should have been level after 16 minutes when Mark Robinson snuck through a gap past Gomarsall and headed for the line before James Simpson-Daniel smothered him and Gomarsall responded quickly enough to deny James Brooks.

However, Gloucester never recovered from losing field position. They turned over a line-out and Shane Drahm kicked through. Gomarsall's fly-hack clearance resembled something more accustomed at his beloved Spurs. Delpont responded but his clearance was charged down by Blowers and Robinson pounced to score.

The conversion tied the scores but Paul kicked Gloucester back ahead with a penalty following meaty charges from Buxton and Robert Todd.

Then they really then[*sic*] should have taken a huge step towards winning the game. Gomarsall and Paul combined in midfield to send Jake Boer arching away but his ball found nobody and then, from a free-kick, Gomarsall, Boer and Buxton drove to within inches of the line; McRae's long pass found Delport but his pass only found the Shed.

Northampton simply weathered the storm. And right on half-time plundered their second try. Blowers found Bruce Reihana with a neat pass and he broke clean away before returning the compliment to Robinson, who scored. The conversion took the Saints seven points ahead and the far from pleased face of Dean Ryan told the story.

HALF-TIME :

GLOUCESTER10
NORTHAMPTON 17

Gloucester's response to going behind was immediate – and rather threatening. They introduced both Vickery and Woodman at the start of the second half.

It gave them an unrivalled superiority in the scrums and extra weight around the field and their return seemed to spark scenes of joy from the home side – on and off the terraces.

Again they screwed Northampton into their own half – Paramore and Boer both made clattering surges as the temperature rose to something near boiling point and just when Gloucester craved a flash of genius, they got it.

Receiving a bumping pass, Simpson-Daniel recovered and slalomed his way through the remainder of the Saints defence to score the equalising try.

It was developing into a thrilling contest because the effort was extraordinary and the mistakes that littered the occasion only fuelled the excitement. Paramore worked himself to a standstill and the presence of Vickery and Woodman was also beginning to tell. They also required some bravery – Chris Fortey took a terrible whack on the leg and should have really come off but stayed on to battle it out.

And then we had the moment the 11,000 sell-out craved. Sometimes, you get what you paid for in this business and after taking possession 30 metres out Woodman scored a try that will be talked about for years.

A hand-off and powerful surge blasted his way through the first wave of Saints cover and as the ground opened up, he shimmied and swerved before plunging over in the far corner.

The reception nearly blasted the roof off Kingsholm – Vickery was the first one there to offer his congratulations and it looked as though Gloucester were escaping their profligacy.

They continued to grind themselves forward – Andy Hazell, on for the highly impressive Buxton, providing a fresh impetus and they really should have got over again – Simpson-Daniel was taken high by Brooks clean through and Gloucester could not profit – but Paul did land a penalty after 73 minutes to take Gloucester 25-17 ahead.

But they were far from safe – Drahm kicking a 78th minute penalty to bring them close to a recovery but Gloucester had the final word with a Paul penalty to end a run of four successive defeats.