

# THE CITIZEN

MONDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2003

GLOUCESTER ERRORS PUNISHED

LEEDS SHOW BATTLING QUALITIES TO CLINCH WIN

LEEDS 22 GLOUCESTER 18

LEEDS : D. Scarborough; D. Rees (M. Cardey 4), A. Snyman, T. Davies, P. Christophers; G. Ross, C. Stuart-Smith; M. Shelley (capt.), M. Holt, G. Powell, P. Murphy, S. Hooper (T. Palmer 72), M. Salter, J. Ponton (D. Hyde 72), A. Popham.

Reps: M. Cusack, A. Kyriacou, R. Walker, T. Walsh.

GLOUCESTER : T. Delpont; M. Garvey, R. Todd (J. Simpson-Daniel 79), H. Paul, T. Fanolua; D. McRae, A. Gomarsall; R. Roncero, C. Fortey, A. Deacon, A. Eustace (M. Cornwell 68), A. Brown, J. Boer (capt.), P. Buxton, J. Paramore.

Reps: C. Collins, N. Wood, P. Johnstone, J. Merriman, A. Page.

Star Man : Peter Buxton.

Referee : D. Pearson (RFU).

Attendance : 7,467

One of Phil Davies' leading characteristics as a pain in the backside number eight and second row forward for the Red Dragon brotherhood at Llanelli and fleetingly for Leeds was his sheer willingness for a scrap.

It is a trait he has successfully woven into the minor miracle he currently oversees at Headingley – one of the quietest but most determined outposts in the Premiership – and it produced a highly significant victory over Gloucester yesterday.

Leeds have almost nothing to speak of in terms of star quality and big-name pulling power – when Mark Regan is granted virtual hero status it is easy to appreciate the size of Davies' task in welding together a team of functional foot soldiers. But they have one defining feature and that is their collective hunger for the fight.

Despite their lack of big-time, big ego, big-money names, they were as competitive as humanly possible on a messy and mucky afternoon that fumbled for continuity and shape, but Leeds added up to considerably more than the sum of their parts to earn a thoroughly deserved victory.

They are names that might not mean much down Gloucester way, but Gary Powell, a tighthead prop who went the distance and then some in a high temperature performance, hooker Matt Holt, a nuisance above and beyond the call of duty, and openside James Ponton, a fidgeting menace at the breakdown, caused Gloucester no end of grief and the rest were not far behind in their determination and energy.

Not only did they plunder the only try when Holt was driven over from a line-out, Leeds also defended with tremendous thought and application in the closing stages – it would have pleased Davies no end.

The Welshman was not at the game – a family illness kept him pacing around the house all afternoon rather than the touchline – but his assistant Jon Callard was delighted with the way his team performed.

"We asked the boys whether they wanted to make a statement about the future of the club and where we saw it going," he said. "I thought we answered those questions and it was a performance that was very much what we are about."

Any sort of victory would have done either side no end of good given their current predicaments – even if it was as disjointed as this – but the concern for Nigel Melville will be the fact Gloucester are losing games this season they were gobbling up last term and it is leaving them way off the Premiership pace.

This was a worrying defeat, their sixth domestic setback already, and it leaves them with minimal room for error in the coming weeks if they are to qualify for the Heineken Cup again.

It will particularly hurt after their outstanding effort against Bourgoin last week. Leeds are certainly not as good but were hugely effective in minimising their errors and it proved the difference.

Despite the fact Gloucester had willing warriors of their own, noticeably Peter Buxton who continued his impressive run of form plus Andy Deacon and Rodrigo Roncero, who matched anything Leeds hurled at them.

Gloucester were undone by their sloppy discipline and a lack of patience in a scrappy contest at the breakdown.

They will have departed Yorkshire kicking themselves all the way down the M1 because they created so much quality field position and dominated possession for so long, particularly in the second half, they should have won the game.

But each time they got in range, Gloucester either conceded a ridiculously stupid penalty or coughed up possession to hand field position immediately back to the home side.

They hardly ever got their wide runners into the contest – Marcel Garvey came closest to scoring after five minutes when he chased onto a cross-field kick by Duncan McRae – but replacement Matt Cardey made an excellent tackle to prevent the try.

After that, Gloucester were restricted to six Henry Paul penalties and, given the conditions, it was an excellent effort. But they did not threaten a try despite the promptings of Andy Gomarsall, who deserves a medal for even attempting to play given his efforts with England the previous evening.

Gloucester were 6-0 ahead by the time Leeds scored – Holt burrowing over from short range after the visitors were penalised for dragging down a maul on two occasions.

It allowed Leeds a foothold in the contest and when it became fractious, particularly in and around the contact area, Scotland's Gordon Ross punished every Gloucester indiscretion with a peerless display of kicking.

Ross epitomises Leeds' spirit. He had a wretched time in the World Cup but made the most of his talent and it paid off here.

Andre Snyman was their one major attacking threat of real quality in the first half, but Gloucester would have trotted off quite happily at the break, despite the fact they trailed 16-12.

They played into the teeth of such a fierce wind, a turnaround was not out of the question with the gale behind them, but Gloucester could not go the extra yard and became so inwardly furious, they lost all pattern and control.

Penalty followed penalty and Ross chipped away while his forwards grafted in a bitter dogfight up front.

It was close all the way through but there was never the feeling Gloucester could win the game.

Only two Paul penalties followed after the break, simply not good enough for all their potential threat, and it was fitting Leeds ended on top, pressing for their second try.

Melville will take some solace from the fact his side managed a bonus point, but they will have to start turning one into four if they are to mount a realistic challenge to finish in the top three.

## MATCH FACTS

SIX MINUTES: It takes Gloucester no time at all to strike an early blow when Henry Paul kicks a penalty after Leeds come off-side from a scrum.

LEEDS 0, GLOUCESTER 3

14 MINUTES: Gloucester's early dominance continues and they double their advantage eight minutes later when the Tykes are penalised for off-side again, this time from a line-out. Paul makes no mistake.

LEEDS 0, GLOUCESTER 6

18 MINUTES: But Leeds spring into life when Andre Snyman breaks through a midfield gap and from there Gloucester are forced into desperate defence. A series of penalties keep the pressure on and when Pete Buxton is penalised for dragging a rolling maul down, Leeds roll a second drive over the line from a line-out where hooker Matt Holt is awarded the score. Gordon Ross converts.

LEEDS 7, GLOUCESTER 6

29 MINUTES: Gloucester remain on the back foot for the next 15 minutes and despite the scrappy nature of the contest, Leeds turn the screw. Ross kicks a penalty after Snyman gets away from Paul and Gloucester are penalised for off-side.

LEEDS 10, GLOUCESTER 6

34 MINUTES: Ross' outstanding effort continues. Not only is he battling away at stand-off, but his goal-kicking is immaculate and he makes Gloucester pay again with his second penalty when the Cherry and Whites again come offside at the breakdown.

LEEDS 13, GLOUCESTER 6

36 MINUTES: Gloucester's problems intensify when Junior Paramore is sinbinned for handling from the wrong side at a ruck and Ross extends Leeds' advantage with a 35-metre penalty.

LEEDS 16, GLOUCESTER 6

37 MINUTES: But immediately from the re-start, Gloucester breath life into their effort when Paul lands an excellent touchline penalty.

LEEDS 16, GLOUCESTER 9

40 MINUTES: Paul is at it again three minutes later after Leeds are caught offside at a ruck to leave Gloucester trailing by only four points.

LEEDS 16, GLOUCESTER 12

47 MINUTES: Leeds then lose Matt Salter to the sinbin when he is penalised for coming into a ruck from the wrong side.

53 MINUTES: But it takes Gloucester six minutes to take advantage with Paul landing his fifth penalty when the Tykes are penalised for not staying on their feet.

LEEDS 16, GLOUCESTER 15

55 MINUTES: Gloucester's frustrations continue to grow and after they are again penalised at the breakdown, Chris Fortey talks back to the referee who marches Leeds forward a further 10 yards and Ross kicks the penalty.

LEEDS 19, GLOUCESTER 15

63 MINUTES: There is still little to choose between the teams and Paul's accuracy pays off again when he brings Gloucester to within a point with 17 minutes remaining with his sixth penalty.

LEEDS 19, GLOUCESTER 18

76 MINUTES: However, they cannot make their dominance tell and pay the price in the closing stages when Paul's attempted clearance hits a post and Leeds are awarded a scrum. Gloucester are penalised for off-side and Ross makes no mistake to seal the victory.

LEEDS 22, GLOUCESTER 18

## MELVILLE: WE PAID THE PENALTY

Gloucester slipped to their sixth Premiership defeat of the season yesterday, leaving them eight points adrift of a play-off place.

Gordon Ross kicked 17 points to inspire Leeds to a thoroughly efficient victory and, despite six penalties from Henry Paul, the Cherry and Whites could not engineer a victory at Headingley.

"It was not a very good game of rugby all round," said Nigel Melville.

"It was very messy and below our normal level of performance.

"We were disappointing in the second half and didn't capitalise on a strong wind. Leeds scrapped for everything but we have to be critical of ourselves, we let the pressure off by giving away too many penalties."

Gloucester trailed 16-12 at half-time, but despite a huge amount of territorial dominance in the second half, they could not secure the try that would have won them the game.

And the defeat also came at a price. Skipper Jake Boer had a nasty cut to his right eye and Andy Gomarsall broke his nose.

But Melville was quick to praise the England scrum-half who played the entire game less than 24 hours after turning out for England at Twickenham.

"All credit must go to Andy and James Simpson-Daniel for making the effort, it was outstanding." Melville said.