

THE CITIZEN

SATURDAY, JANUARY 3, 2004

GLORIOUS GLOUCESTER TRIUMPH AT LEICESTER

TOOTHLESS TIGERS MAULED BY CLINICAL CHERRY AND WHITES

LEICESTER 18 GLOUCESTER 28

LEICESTER : J. V. D. Westhuizen; N. Baxter, L. Lloyd, O. Smith, F. Tuilagi; A. Goode, A. Healey; G. Rowntree, J. Richards, D. Morris, M. Johnson, B. Kay, W. Johnson, N. Back (capt.), H. Tuilagi.

Reps: W. Skinner, G. Chuter, R. Nebbett, L. Deacon, S. Vesty, L. Myring, G. Gelderbloom.

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

Reps: C. Collins, R. Roncero, N. Wood, A. Eustace, J. Merriman, A. Page, T. Fanolua.

REFEREE : R. Maybank (RFU).

Alex Brown, Junior Paramore and Duncan McRae scored tries as Gloucester secured their first Premiership victory at Welford Road.

The match was close for a long time and Gloucester were not helped by some enigmatic refereeing, but the Cherry and Whites eventually sealed a deserved victory with McRae's late try.

Back in business, and how. Gloucester raided Welford Road to plunder their first ever victory on Leicester soil thanks to a remarkably controlled performance and three tries.

The victory is by far the most significant in their season – greeted as it was by euphoric joy by both Nigel Melville and Dean Ryan who left their seats in the stands to acclaim their team.

And it was impossible to say they did not deserve it. Gloucester defused the potential power of the Tigers pack and defended with resolute determination to create tries for Alex Brown, Junior Paramore and Duncan McRae.

They will go into their Heineken Cup meeting with Munster with considerable wind in their sails.

It took a bit of time to get going – roughly 40 minutes to be precise – but at the end of a far from satisfactory opening half, the game burst into life with the sort of try that reaffirms your faith in the game to establish a seven point Gloucester advantage.

Away from some wayward kicking, mis-directed punting and a general haze thrown over anything worthy of an attacking name, Gloucester went the length of the field through half a dozen pairs of hands before Alex Brown almost had his head removed by a dangerously high tackle by Freddie Tuilagi before wriggling over the line for the try.

It was a fitting way for Brown to end the half. He had been one of the outstanding components in the Gloucester pack, alongside the equally admirable contribution from Jake Boer, who worked themselves to a standstill.

But the heart of the move lay in the hands of the enigmatic Henry Paul, who carried possession almost 40 metres with a swaying break from a quick tap penalty through a thicket of defenders.

As Leicester scurried back, Paul found Marcel Garvey and Jon Goodridge near the far corner before a long pass from James Simpson-Daniel created the room for BROWN to score.

The try came completely out of the blue and undid a Leicester advantage that had been established through a straight-line break from OLLIE SMITH at the start of the second quarter.

He moved neatly onto a short pass from Andy Goode to get between Duncan McRae and Paul and around Goodridge for the score. The conversion took the Tigers 7-3 ahead but the two illuminating passages of attack were in stark contrast to much of the half.

Both teams traded possession through a variety of different avenues, and while the Gloucester line-out had been steady, and Andy Gomarsall covered vast tracts of ground, neither team threatened with any regularity.

Leicester looked to move the ball in short, flat passes from Goode, but apart from the try, Gloucester defended with solid control. They went into the lead with a MCRAE drop-goal after good work by Garvey, Chris Fortey, and Gomarsall.

Then came Smith's response, but Gloucester were not shaken from their task and launched a counter through Paul and Simpson-Daniel whose attempted pass was knocked on by Freddie Tuilagi and PAUL landed the penalty.

By minimising mistakes – a trait Gloucester have hardly been proficient at in recent weeks – they looked capable of causing damage and when McRae and Gomarsall swung a move to the right where Boer ploughed a deep furrow, MCRAE dropped his second goal to regain the lead at 9-7.

Gloucester then got expansive to throw the contest wide open and ask just a few more questions of the Tigers.

The answer was that it had seriously rattled the home side. It could have been worse too had referee Roy Maybank awarded a penalty try – as the severity of Tuilagi's tackle merited, therefore handing Paul a certain two points in front of the posts.

As he hadn't, Gloucester were only seven ahead when Leicester started the second half with a penalty to cut the deficit but the Cherry and Whites blasted back with another try of their own.

They had been camped in Leicester territory when Gomarsall combined with McRae, whose long pass found Boer.

The skipper made the first couple of yards but had the awareness to send an inside ball to JUNIOR PARAMORE who scored. PAUL converted from the touchline.

Suddenly, Gloucester were 21-10 ahead, a distance so great that it was the platform to victory.

But these Tigers know how to fight. For the majority of the time they had failed to dominate up front like days of old and out wide were seriously one dimensional, where their uncertainty was characterised in four attempted drop-goals by Goode, none of which were on target, but a second try raised hopes of a Welford Road comeback.

Goode was involved when his long pass found Leon Lloyd with the chance to break and although Simpson-Daniel got back to make the tackle, Lloyd was able to get his pass away to NEIL BAXTER who scored.

Then, a 57th minute penalty intensified the pressure on Gloucester when GOODE was on target from 30 metres out to make it 18-21.

Amid the points spree, nobody seemed to notice the fact Martin Johnson had left the field but to Gloucester, nothing seemed to matter.

Their effort had been relentless, tight and controlled and they even found time to create another golden chance to win the game.

Goodridge made a slashing break that took him within striking distance but Jaco Van Der Westhuizen made a tremendous tackle.

Paul also missed a penalty that would have left Leicester needing a try, but as it was, we entered the final drama with Leicester clinging on.

Neither side could muster a crucial try but in the last minute, Maybank somehow found reason to penalise Boer at the break-down, despite a knock-on from Graham Rowntree that was obvious as the day is long and Good had the chance to tie the scores.

But head on to the sticks, he stuffed his kick to the right of the posts. The Tigers regrouped to launch another wave of attacks but Gloucester's first-up tackling remained strong – Woodman blocking himself in the way of dangerous attack – and at the end, it was Gloucester who had the final say in the 85th minute and it was impossible to say that they did not deserve it.

Boer carried a line-out miles into Leicester territory and when Gomarsall spun it left, MCRAE cut the angle to score. PAUL'S conversion hit the left post but went over to confirm Gloucester's first league victory at Welford Road.

Star Man : Alex Brown.

JC